

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Sent in by Jack Laversuch.

THE carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, was written by two Jesuits in the late 1500s. It was to comfort persecuted Catholics in Elizabeth I's England. The carol may sound nonsensical, but is, in fact, like a catechism in code.

The twelve days run from Christmas to the Feast of the Epiphany; "My true Love sent to me" is God giving gifts to the oppressed Catholic.

These gifts are "twelve drummers drumming", the twelve articles of the creed; "eleven pipers piping", the apostles (no Judas) who pipe the faith; "ten lords a-leaping", the Ten Commandments.

The "nine ladies dancing" are the nine choirs of angels; the "eight maids a-milking", the eight beatitudes; the "seven swans a-swimming", the seven sacraments; the "six geese a-laying", the Church's precepts.

The "five golden rings" are the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; the "four calling birds" are the gospels; the "three French hens" are the gifts brought by the wise men; the "two turtle doves" are the Old and New Testaments.

But the first gift, the "partridge in a pear tree", is the risen Christ reigning from the cross.

BUT....

We all know the song about the twelve days of Christmas with its ever growing list of exotic (and highly unlikely) presents. Well it seems that the generosity of the donor has come under the ever-watchful eye of the Ministry for Administrative Affairs which has issued a series of warnings:

1. The partridge may be shot between September 1 and January 1, so if it is an ex-partridge, one that is deceased, etc. fair enough – though there may be a health regulation breach in wrapping it in a pear tree. If it is a living partridge it must be accompanied by a permit under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and its movements may be further restricted under the regulations governing "Bird Flu", as may all other avian species included in the gift. Meanwhile movement of a pear tree within the EU must be in conformity with Council Directive 2000/29/EC on protective measures against pear decline mycoplasma.
2. The turtle dove is a summer visitor to the UK, and keeping these two in captivity till Christmas is in contravention of the EU Council directive of

1979 on the conservation of wild birds.

3. The French hens, being laying birds, must according to EU legislation be housed in a cage area at least 750 sq cm per hen. The cage must have litter that allows pecking and scratching, be provided with a perch, a feed trough and a two-outlet drinking system.

4. Calling birds, or collie birds, are blackbirds and may not be kept as pets. (See reference to the EU directive on conservation of wild birds, above)

5. If sent by post, recorded delivery items and special delivery items are only covered up to a maximum value. (See Post Office publications for latest values). If the gold comes from abroad, 1966 legislation on importation of precious metals may apply.

6. Disturbing a laying goose is probably a punishable offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911. The eggs of the Canada Goose may only be taken if in possession of the appropriate licence.

7. Swans have been royal birds since the twelfth century and, through the definition in the Act of Swans passed in 1482, are, unless otherwise stated, Crown property. Certain landowners, the Vintners Company and the Dyers Company may own swans, but they must be correctly marked and identified.

8. The eight maids-a-milking raise all sorts of issues regarding animal welfare legislation, foot and mouth, mad cow disease, farm workers employment terms and conditions, sex discrimination and health regulations on pasteurisation of milk. There are over a hundred EU documents relating to cows and nearly a thousand relating to milk - happy reading!

9. Under the terms of the Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1982 the dancing ladies require a music and entertainment licence.

10. Many lords are of advanced years; to have them a-leaping must be considered a hazardous occupation or sport, and appropriate insurance would need to be taken out. Leaping might be considered a form of entertainment, and once again the appropriate licence would be required. 11. Not only would these musicians require a music and entertainment licence, but under the Control of pollution Act 1974 and the Noise Act 1996, noise levels must not interfere with your neighbours right to peace and tranquillity.

12. Re. the twelve drummers drumming, see Number 11 above.

All in all a book token might be a better idea. Merry Christmas!