

Feast of Feasts: Celebrations in the Folger Collection

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1. New Year's gift roll of Elizabeth I, Queen of England. 1565.

Z.d.12

This gift roll is one of several in the Folger's collection. Bearing the signature of Elizabeth I, it lists the gifts given on one side and those received on the other from a date early on in her reign. The list progresses from the highest-ranking court members all the way down to household servants. The gifts themselves provide an invaluable window into material culture. Besides gold and jewels, the received gifts include wooden chests, sweetmeats, musical instruments, potted plants, and pieces of clothing such as ruffs, slippers, petticoats, and hats. In contrast to the variety of gifts received, the gifts given by Elizabeth are almost exclusively gilt bowls and cups. *Full transcription available.*

2. Wenceslaus Hollar. Hyems [Winter: The Parade Ground]. c1628-29.

ART 252- 551 no.4 (size XS)

This view of a parade in winter was probably etched in Strasbourg sometime between 1628 and 1629 as part of a set of views of the Four Seasons in that city. Among Hollar's most delicately worked early prints, this set shows Hollar's individual touch in the soft moldings of the contours of the trees, despite the visible influence of Jan van de Velde's prints. Hollar subsequently revisited motifs of Strasbourg during the course of his career.

3. Edward Fisher. The Feast of Feasts. Or, the celebration of the sacred nativity of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. 1644.

F994

Religious controversy regarding the celebration of Christmas and New Years was common in the Early Modern period. Many Puritan theologians argued against it, claiming that traditions such as feasts and gift-giving on Christmas distracted from the holiday's religious meaning and hearkened back to pagan rites. In this tract, however, a Royalist clergyman draws on scriptural and historical arguments to defend Christmas celebrations. Maintaining these traditions also became a signal of resistance to Puritan rule and loyalty to the Crown. His text was very successful, as it was re-published and re-printed multiple times through the 17th century. Clearly many people were not too eager to give up their Yuletide festivities.

4. A Christmas messe. 1619.

J.a.1 (9)

This manuscript play was likely written for a Cambridge University Christmas production. King Beefe attempts to usurp the right of King Brawne—boar's meat—to be served first at the traditional Christmas feast. Each king receives the support, in the form of boasting and bravado, of their respective knights: Sir Pepper and Sir Vinigar for Beefe, and Lord Souce and Mustard for Brawne. Queen Mincepy acts as the token beauty. Meanwhile, the action of the minor characters (Bread, Salt, Trencher, Tablecloth, and Cushion) parallels that of the major characters. The Belly provides the framework for the play in his insistence that the feast be served post-haste, while the Cook acts as the final mediator, wielding his knife and declaring Brawne the victor. *Full transcription available.*

5. Maximilien Belle-Alesne. Le magnifique et superlicoquentieux festin : ... avec la liste de tous les régales, services de table, mets, desserts & préparatifs du festin ; et la réjouissance, les danses, & autres divertissemens de l'illustre compagnie. 1731.

218- 878.2q

This witty 18th-century popular text takes the form of an invitation and menu for a cobbler's banquet. It is addressed to one of the guild masters from a new member. Part of a series of three similar texts, these books also show guilds' use of language which mimics that of the chancellery, each book being stamped with the official permission and approval of the guild. Due to the suppression of guilds in France during the French Revolution, this once thriving genre of popular literature was largely lost by the mid-19th century.

6. Abraham Bosse. [Wives at the table during the absence of their husbands]. c1636.

ART 265- 963 (size XS)

Conflict between the sexes was a popular subject of art and literature in the seventeenth century. As the verses below the etching explain, these women have gathered to enjoy a feast where they can talk freely while their husbands are out enjoying the world. "Let's eat, let's drink, there are no spies here" they say. Separate dining rooms for private meals did not exist at the time. Consequently, the lady of the house entertains her friends in her chamber, with a bed in one corner, while the servant (addressed as "Girl" in the verses) brings more food.

7. Expenses of the diet provided to Court of Star Chamber during Easter term signed by Sir Christopher Hatton and Lord Burghley. 1591.

X.d.98

The judges and privy councilors of the Star Chamber often shared rich midday dinners on Wednesdays and Fridays, after the morning session. The Friday feasts offered fish as dictated by prevailing custom. This menu from April 30, 1591 includes at least thirty varieties, including oysters, herring, salmon, pike, crayfish, eels, shrimp, trout, lobster, crab, and haddock.

Transcription of folio 3r:

<p>die veneris xxx^o Aprilis 1591</p> <p><i>Praesentibus</i> <i>my lord of Canterbury</i> <i>my lord Channcellor</i> <i>my lord of Treasuror</i> <i>my lord of Buchurst</i> <i>Sir ffrancys Knowells /</i> <i>Mr Vnder Treasuror</i> <i>of the Exchequor</i> <i>Sir Arthure</i> <i>Henningham.</i> <i>Sir William Hatton. /</i> <i>Mr Doctor Cesar</i> <i>Mr Recorder</i> <i>Mr Attorney</i> <i>Mr Asheley. /</i></p>	<p>Inprimis in breade xxiiij^s in beare vij^s vj^d in Ale v^s in fflower vj^s } xlij^s vj^d</p> <p>Item in Oysters iiij^s in sweet butter ij^s in olde Lynge xiiij^s in Salt Samon ix^s in greene fishe viij^s in iij great Pikes xvj^s in iij smaller Pikes x^s in iij great Carpes xij^s in vj smaller Carpes xij^s in iij breames xvij^s in iij Tenches xij^s in iij greate Rostinge Eles vij^s vj^d in xij knobberdes iij^s in ix Perches ix^s in Trowtes x^s in fflounders v^s in Barbles xijs in Chevyns vj^s in Chubbes vij^s in Soules xiiij^s iiij^d in Creyfishe iij^s in place xv^s in Purles vj^s in Gurnettes xv^s in Prawnes iiij^s in Lobsters x^s in Crabbes xij^s in mackarell iijs iiij^d in Whytinges xvj^s in j freshe Samon and a Chyne xxvij^s in Earbes iij^s iiij^d in Creame ij^s iiij^d in pounded Butter xvij^s iiij^d in Apples for Tartes ij^s in Egges ix^s in Orenge & Lemons ij^s in Barbaryes xij^d in Rose water xij^d in Quince vj^s in fruite viij^d in Portage iijs in bote hire in all iiij^s</p> <p style="text-align: right;">} xvij^{li} xii^s x^d <i>paid</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Summa xix^{li} xvj^s iiij^d paid</i></p>
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8. Bartolomeo Scappi. Opera di Bartolomeo Scappi. 1605.

TX711.S4 1605 Copy 1 Cage

Bartolomeo Scappi, cook of the Holy See, contributed more visibly to the art of cooking than perhaps any other 17th-century chef, achieving great renown in his lifetime. The Opera's six lengthy chapters expound on the preparation of meat and poultry, fish, food for meat and fast days, pasta, and diets for the sick. He also includes the organization of the kitchen, the duties expected of kitchen staff, and the ethical aspects of the cook's profession. The book's twenty-seven engravings provide a privileged look at the Italian kitchen, its kitchenware, and its functioning.

9. Francis Sandford. The history of the coronation of the most high, most mighty, and most excellent monarch, James II. 1687.

S652

James II appointed a committee to establish a code of precedence for his coronation as well as subsequent ones. The Lancaster Herald of Arms, Francis Sanford, was then commissioned to give a full visual account of the carefully codified coronation ceremonies of April 23, 1685. Sanford records all of the preparations, regalia, participants, robing, procession, banquet, and fireworks of the coronation. At the banquet, as seen in the engraving, the King and Queen were served 145 dishes in the first course followed by 30 in the second. Peers and peeresses were served 639 dishes, while archbishops, bishops, barons, and judges were served 631. In total, 1,445 dishes were served at this banquet alone.

10. Adriaan Schoonebeek. Afbeelding... Shouw of bonfires and fireworcks made through the Englisch merchants in Amsterdam on the coronation day of William III and Mary II. 1689.

ART 236- 026 (size XL)

The English merchants of Amsterdam organized and financed this celebration for the coronation of William and Mary of England. Until the end of the eighteenth century, fireworks were rare and mainly used to display the power and wealth of royalty. Printed depictions were just as important in communicating this political message. As the transience of fireworks makes them difficult to represent, artistic depictions varied, some resembling fountains of water, others raging fires and exploding stars. Schoonebeek has created a rendering full of the movement and unpredictability of pyrotechnics perhaps as impressive as the original show itself.

11. Raoul Auger Feuillet. Orchesography, or the Art of Dancing by characters and demonstrative figures. 1721.

153- 841q

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, demand grew in aristocratic and well-to-do circles for up-to-date dance repertoires. Dance masters met this demand by composing new dances and publishing them at the start of each season, giving people enough time to learn the new steps. Leading French dance master Raoul Agger Feuillet developed, alongside P. Beauchamps, an important system of dance notation that departed from the previous norm of verbal explanations in dance manuals. *The Orchesography*, a translation by John Weaver of Feuillet's *Livre de Choreographie*, first introduced this dance notation to England, where the production of dance books had begun to take off.

12. Abraham Bosse. [The Ball]. 1634.

ART 264- 931 (size M)

“The Ball” is one of Abraham Bosse’s most famous etchings. Love is in the air as couples join hands and prepare for their turn at dancing in a great tapestry-hung hall. At the back of the room, a portrait of Venus presides over the ball while a group of musicians plays discreetly in the back corner. The couple at the center are dressed in the height of fashion. Though the verses warn that everyone is watching to see who dances well and who dances poorly, most couples only have eyes for each other.

13. Crispin Van de Passe. [The foolish virgins at the ball]. c1600.

ART 265- 963 (size XS)

In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the five foolish virgins are cast out of Christ’s ‘wedding’ due to their lack of preparation: they fail to bring enough oil for their lamps. Van de Passe’s depiction strays far from the original parable, instead depicting virgins who find their folly in fleshly indulgence. While this image of a dance held in a bedroom portrays the debauchery of their actions, the liveliness of the scene also draws in the viewer. The movement and music further contrast to the very solemn inscription:

Lux nulla vbi est, densas tenebras esse ibi Certum est. Libidinem carnis seques suae. Sine dubio praecepta negligit Dei: Ideoque Luce et Oleo priuatur sacre (Rough translation: Where there is no light, there is sure to be deep darkness. They dote on their own fleshly desires. Without a doubt they disregard divine precepts, and therefore are deprived of both holy light and oil).

14. Wenceslaus Hollar. [Rustic Wedding Dance]. 1650.

ART 256- 914 (size M)

This counterproof of an etching by Hollar after Pieter Bruegel the Elder shows a wedding feast in a village landscape. The bride is seated under a tree in the middle distance, at a table screened by a sheet; peasants dance in the foreground. A millstream and mill can be seen in the background.

15. Letter from Walter Bagot, London, to Richard Bagot. 1579.

L.a.97

The correspondence in the Bagot Collection—the largest manuscript letter collection at the Folger—includes a wide variety of topics and gives insight into the daily life of a gentry family, its web of family connections, and the duties its members performed for the Crown. The present letter from Walter Bagot to Robert concerns the appointment of sheriffs to office and the recounts a reluctant marriage of gentleman who was bound, by forfeiture of all his lands, to wed a citizen's daughter. Following the bride's apparent infidelity, the gentleman arranged for him and his wedding party to arrive with horns worn around their necks.

Transcription ll. 14-29:

departe Ther was a very strange weddinge in
London of lately of a gentilman and a cytisens daughter
the gintilman was bound vpon forfiture of all his
lands to mary a her by a certen daye & before the
prefixed time suspectinge her with an other would haue
geuen a great soom of mony to haue bin released
of his band but the cytisen would in any case
constraine him to mary her wherfore the gentilman
against the daye prepared a great number of his
acquaintaince with euery one an horne about his necke
and so meeting with his wife at the church they
were maried with a ringe of horne and after the
mariage euery one blowinge a rechate solemnely his
bride and he parted. I know non other newes that
is worth the wrytinge wherfore in hast I take
my leave the sixth of Nouember

16. The Apostles. Shakspere Annual Commemoration. 1860.

[Uncatalogued]

This program is likely from a dinner of The Apostles, a 'secret' intellectual society founded in 1820 by and for select Cambridge University students. A detailed menu, with accompanying Shakespeare quotes, fills up the front page. Inside can be found their list of toasts, with quotes from the Bard used here to poke fun at the different members' academic pursuits. Finally, they include passages from *Romeo and Juliet* to be discussed presumably after the meal.

17. Anne Hathaway Shakespeare Club. Our twenty-first birthday: "Will it please you taste of what is here?" 1916.

Sh.Misc.2089

At turn of the 20th century, Shakespeare clubs were immensely popular, with over five hundred existing across the US. They provided spaces where people, primarily women, could come together to study, discuss, and perform Shakespeare. Often, they played a wider philanthropic role in their communities, fundraising for charities and promoting women's rights. This menu is from a 1916 dinner of the Anne Hathaway Shakespeare Club of Colorado Springs, founded in 1895, and includes quotes from Shakespeare to accompany the dishes.

18. Warren's humourous Twelfth Night characters. 18th c.?

ART File S527.3 no.20 (size L)

For centuries, advertisers have borrowed Shakespeare's prestige to sell all manner of products, from tobacco to sewing machines. A notable example of this phenomenon in the Folger Collection, this Twelfth night party game comes complete with twenty characters from several plays—three from Shakespeare—and verses extolling Warren's blacking "made at 30, Strand." Warren's Blacking was a leading manufacturer of shoe polish in the 19th century. Charles Dickens notoriously worked there when he was twelve years old, gluing labels onto the blacking pots, while his father was in prison for debt.

19. The Shakespeare Oracle, or, Wheel of fortune. 1892.

ART Flat c25

Shakespeare-themed party games make up a fun segment of the Folger's collection. This example from the late 19th century uses quotations from Shakespeare's plays as answers that provide either a "fortuitous" or an "unlucky" fortune for each player. Because of the ambiguity of Shakespeare's words, it is up to the remaining players to interpret the fortunes as either positive or negative. After working through every disc, the player with the highest number of lucky fortunes is declared winner.

20. The house at Stratford upon Avon...with a representation of tragedy and comedy crowning the bust of Shakespeare, surrounded by his principal dramatic characters. Taken at the last grand festival. Early/mid-19th c.

ART File S527.8 no.26 copy 2 (size XS)

Published by N. Whittock, this early- to mid-19th-century print was made for members of the Shakespeare Club. These festivities and rituals focused on celebrating Shakespeare as a man and personality. Garrick's jubilee in 1769 began this ongoing tradition, marking the first time Shakespeare's birthday was celebrated in Stratford-upon-Avon. During Garrick's three-day festival, Garrick delivered an ode to Shakespeare, reintroduced neglected plays, built a temple to Shakespeare at his estate, and had the eminent painter Thomas Gainsborough paint a portrait of him with a bust of the Bard. Ironically, the entire festival was an utter failure, despite the planning and money involved, due to heavy rain.