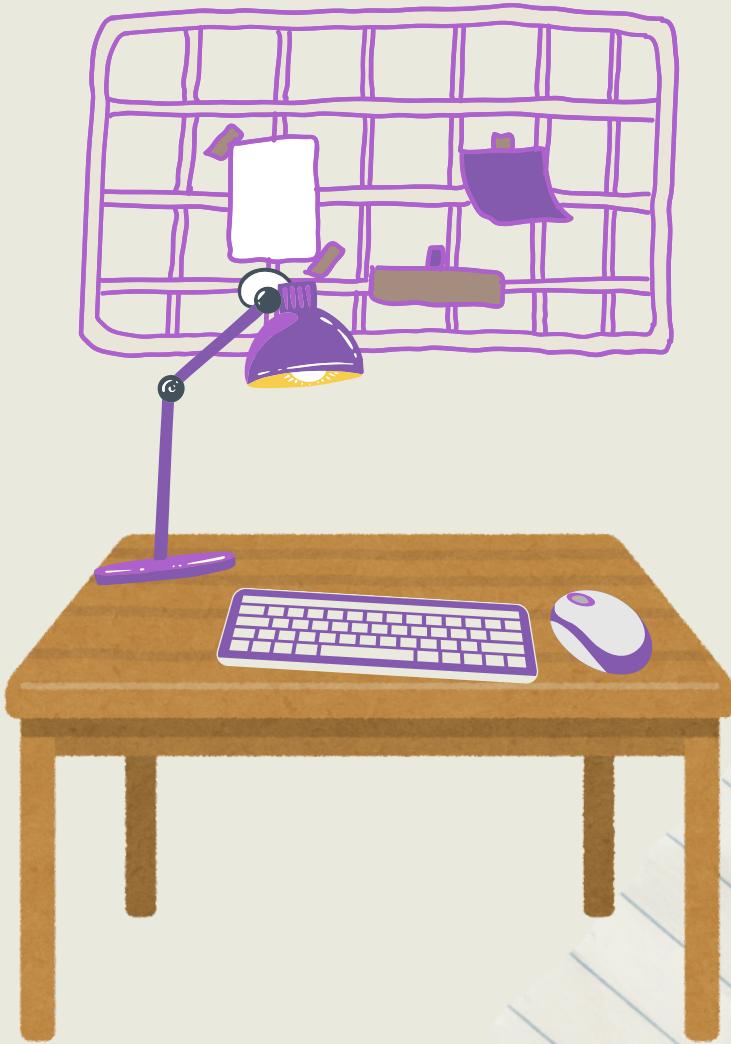


The Aston Canon

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The Magic of New York at Christmas

New York City is one of the most familiar images in popular culture. Even people who have never visited can picture the Rockefeller Centre tree, Fifth Avenue lit up for the season, and the crowds moving through Central Park in the cold. Over time, these scenes have developed into something bigger than tradition, they've become part of a modern romantic mythology shaped by film, media, and the city's own commitment to spectacle.



Featured image courtesy of [Kaydn Ito](#) on [Unsplash](#). No changes were made to this image. Image license found [here](#).

The Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree is at the centre of this image. Its origins in 1931 were surprisingly modest: a small tree put up by construction workers during the Great Depression, decorated with tin cans and homemade garlands. The fact that it began as a symbol of hope makes its modern scale feel even more significant. Now it stands around 70-100 feet tall, topped with a Swarovski star, attracting millions of visitors every year. It's grown from a gesture of resilience into one of the world's most recognisable holiday landmarks. The nearby skating rink, especially the Rockefeller Rink and Wollman Rink in Central Park, add to the city's winter atmosphere. There is something naturally appealing about skating outdoors, surrounded by lights and buildings, and this charm has been amplified for decades by films set in New York. Wollman Rink in particular features in several romantic comedies, which has helped turn it into a symbolic winter date spot rather than just a recreational space.

The mix of scenery, movement, and cold weather makes these rinks feel like small escapes from the usual pace of the city.

Film and television have played a huge role in shaping how people imagine Christmas in New York. Since the post-WWII era, movies have used the city as a backdrop for stories about family, love, and second chances. Films like *Miracle on 34th Street* grounded their narratives in real New York locations and traditions, helping to solidify the city as a festive setting. Later films continued this pattern, presenting New York as a place where coincidences matter and emotional turning points seem to happen against a backdrop of lights, snow, and holiday decorations. Even characters getting lost or running through the city at night becomes part of a larger romantic fantasy.

Alongside cinematic influence, New York's commercial traditions also shape its holiday identity. Department store window displays, first introduced by Macy's in the 1870s, have evolved into complex visual narratives that attract crowds every winter. These displays require months of planning and huge budgets, turning shopping streets into temporary open-air galleries. The level of detail and craftsmanship, combined with the sheer number of people who come to see them, gives the city a distinctive, theatrical feel during December.

More recent additions, like holiday markets at Union Square and Bryant Park, contribute to this festive environment. Although they only began in the 1990s and early 2000s, they've quickly become seasonal fixtures. Their wooden stalls, handmade gifts, and food vendors add a sense of warmth and tradition that contrasts with the city's scale. Even small details, like the smell of roasted chestnuts or live music, help make New York feel more intimate during the winter.

The Magic of New York at Christmas

Literature has also played a part in forming the emotional tone associated with Christmas in the city. Stories like O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi", which takes place in a modest New York apartment, highlights themes of sacrifices, love, and finding meaning in limited circumstances. While the story is over a century old, its focus on human connection aligns well with the more modern narratives that films and television continue to explore.

What sets New York apart from other cities with strong holiday traditions, like London, Paris, Chicago or Boston, is the scale and visibility of its celebrations. London and Paris offer more traditional or understated atmospheres, while Chicago and Boston have plenty of winter charm, but without the same global media attention. New York, by contrast, leans fully into spectacle. Its decorations are large, its events are heavily publicised, and its holiday imagery is constantly circulated through films, social media, and tourism campaigns. It is a city that embraces its own role as a cultural symbol.

Ultimately, New York's Christmas romanticism works because it combines large-spectacle with small, personal moments. The city provides the lights, the landmarks, and the atmosphere, but people bring their own expectations and emotions to it, whether that's nostalgia, excitement, or the feeling that anything can happen. This blend of tradition, media influence, and genuine experience is what keeps New York at the centre of the world's holiday imagination.

And with that in mind, it feels only right to borrow a final line from one of the city's most iconic Christmas films:

"Merry Christmas, you filthy animal"

A Festive Guide to Birmingham

One thing Birmingham truly excels at each year is Christmas. The city lights up with beautiful decorations, creating a magical atmosphere that helps brighten even the coldest winter days. To help you unwind during exam season and fully embrace the festive spirit, I've compiled a list of my favourite Christmas activities to enjoy around Birmingham.

Walks:

1. Brum's Christmas Reindeers' Trail

Every year, Birmingham hosts a festive sculpture trail featuring a new theme. This year, it is the reindeer, but in the past, we have had penguins and bulls. It is one of my favourite activities as it allows you to explore the whole city while enjoying the Christmas decorations. It is also perfect for friends or family visiting Birmingham.



Featured images taken by the author.

2. Christmas Tree Walk :

This year, my friends and I created our own Christmas tree walk around the city, and it was so much fun. Some highlights include the Selfridges tree, the picturesque canal-side display behind the Sea Life centre (with a mini water fountain in the background), and the Aston University lights and tree. It's another great way to see Birmingham and a perfect photo opportunity.

Activities

3. Ice Skating

Although it is slightly overpriced in my opinion, ice skating is still a worthwhile experience and only comes once a year. It is a great activity to get into the festive mood. Even though I cannot ice skate at all, it's part of the fun and I'm going again twice this year to embarrass myself.

4. Christmas Markets

The most important stop of the year is the Christmas markets. From the fresh, delicious churros which are delicious, and the Christmas music performances in Victoria Square, to the marshmallow roasting in St Paul's Square and hot chocolate everywhere, they are the perfect place to get cosy and enjoy some festive food.

5. Quiz night

A Christmas-themed quiz night is always a great idea. I am very competitive so always want to win but is fun to take part with friends and family while testing your knowledge.

Views:

6. Birmingham Library balcony

The balcony at the Birmingham Library offers an amazing viewpoint to see the Christmas wheel and city lights from above and another perfect photo opportunity.

7. The Wheel

Located right next to the ice rink, the Christmas wheel is a fun activity and a great way to experience Birmingham from a completely new perspective.

A Festive Guide to Birmingham

8. Theatre:

The Nutcracker

This classic ballet is a perfect festive performance. The dancing, performed by the Birmingham Ballet Company, is exceptional, and the story is magical and child-friendly making it ideal for the whole family. Plus, it's lovely to see everyone dressed up for the occasion.

I hope you have a great holiday season and get the chance to try out some of these festive activities around Birmingham.

9. Any Other Play or Theatre Performance

Any theatre performance at this time of year is a great choice. I have previously seen the bodyguard musical, which is brilliant. Whether you go with friends or family it is always a special experience.

have seen bodyguard the musical is a good one any musical at this time of year or a play with friends see family and friends.



Featured images taken by the author.

Unboxing the History of Boxing Day

Just when you thought Christmas couldn't get any better, Boxing Day arrives like a surprise present; a day where Dad can recover from overstuffing on stuffing while you enjoy all the new toys Father Christmas got for you. But where does this magical day come from?

We can trace the relevance of the 26th of December back to Saint Stephen's Day, which is held in memorial of Saint Stephen, one of the first people killed for his faith in Jesus. On this day, churches opened their alms boxes and distributed the donations collected across the year, to those in need. It's believed this is why we refer to it as 'Boxing' day – although I still like to think it is because of the piles of cardboard boxes left from presents.

Skip forward a couple of centuries to the Victorian era, and we find that the 26th of December has gained an additional meaning. On Christmas Day, servants were busy serving (surprisingly), ensuring the day runs smoothly for their employers. Because of this, they could not visit their families on the 25th of December. In a very rare act of goodwill, their employers would graciously allow them a day off on the 26th of December to visit their families, providing them a "Christmas Box" containing money, gifts and leftover food.

For those of you concerned about how those poor, rich landowners managed one whole day without their staff, worry not. Fox hunting became popular around this time and even today, it's still tradition to partake in a "trail hunt" (despite the controversy this brings) on Boxing Day.

Speaking of traditions, what would Boxing Day be without spending the day watching football? (Peaceful, if you had to ask me). Ever since the match between Hallam and Sheffield in 1860, football has become a mainstay in British Christmas traditions. And when this tradition inevitably spread across the Commonwealth, cricket took place as the sport that people will spend an entire day fawning over.

Today, Boxing Day is held as a bank holiday here and across the Commonwealth. It's a day we all look forward to, but often overlook. It's extra time to spend with family, it's extra time for kids and adults alike to check out their new toys. But most importantly, it's extra time to eat through those leftovers.

To those celebrating, have a Merry Christmas, and to everyone else, enjoy the extra bank holiday.

In Defence of Doubt ?

This article reflects on changing attitudes towards uncertainty.

As much as I struggle to accept them, the warm sunlight of a good compliment lingers in my psyche. That's the reason I enjoy tarot cards and palm readings: Even the most scientific of us can't resist the seeds of doubt they plant.

One of my favourite movie quotes is "You need to resign yourself to the awkwardness of life". It's served as a remedy for my reaction towards the internet age, where I feel many of us have cultivated an insatiable perfectionism.

A friend recently brought up "Digital Colonialism"- the idea of our language and ideas being shaped by the technology we use. Now, if you've ever asked AI to try to be witty, you quickly realise that... it's painfully not. It lacks the creative element of risk and there's good reason for that- they don't want to get sued. But I don't want to think in legalese.

There's also a massive reduction in comedy movies in recent years. Risk, doubt and wit are not in season, and I can't help but wonder if our march towards a technocratic winter is to blame.

A thought experiment I discussed with a linguistics teacher, this weekend: Try perceiving something but not attaching any language to it. No definitions, no rationalisations, nothing. Succumb to the second language that speaks much quieter than our vocal cords: It's much harder to get sued that way.

I know that typical article structure says that I should end on a summary, a rally to action or an optimistic perspective shift. But, nah: I will exist outside of the abstracting nature of words. I'm reminded of a quote about questions being more important than answers, and you've probably heard it too- we all exist in the algorithm's food chain somewhere.

Goodnight my fellow digital colonists.

Starting December In My Happy Place

Concerts are my happy place. Concerts are and will be my forever constant. Every year, you will (and that is a definite) find me with at least one concert booked and to look forward to. As much as I love attending the big shows for popular artists, I also love appreciating my smaller artists. This December, I had the pleasure of starting the festive month by finally seeing Erin LeCount in concert and I was beyond thrilled with my experience.

I went out of my comfort zone by going to the concert alone. In the last year, I have had the revelation that I should not restrict my own happiness because of the inability of doing things alone, just because I didn't have anyone to go to the concert with should not mean I shouldn't go. So I went alone and I had a wonderful time. I would do it again. So if you learn anything from my article, its to embrace your own company and your own passions and enjoy yourself no matter what.

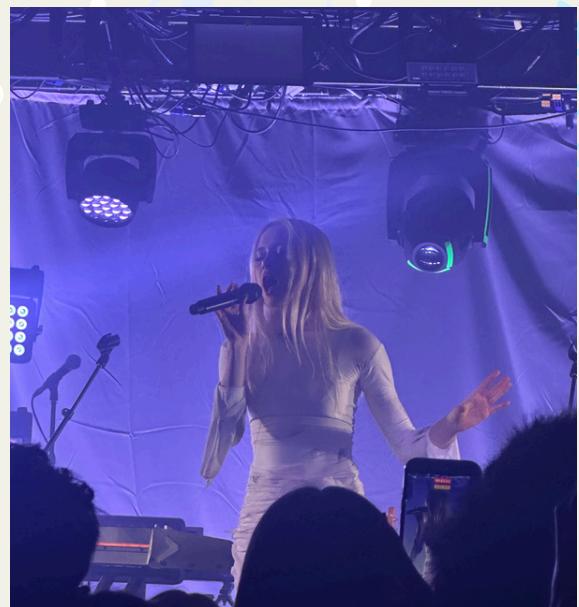
Erin LeCount is from Essex who has successfully built up her own career as she writes and produces her own music. The first time I heard of Erin was on a common UK TV show called The Voice Kids. She appeared on the show in 2017, and I have been following her since then. One thing I love is her aesthetic and ethereal vibe. This is also reflected in her music. Some of my favourite songs, that I highly recommend are: Silver Spoon, Machine Ghost, & Sweet Fruit.

As I mentioned previously, I had the pleasure of witnessing her music live in concert. Her concert in Birmingham took place in Digbeth at the O2 Institute. She came on stage around quarter to 9 and finished her set a little bit after 10. We heard early songs, unreleased songs, and her most popular songs! She even guided us to sing a note which she manipulated into the introduction of her song 'Heaven'. Seeing that happen in front of me was truly insane, she is extremely talented. Ultimately, Erin is a force to be reckoned with, her lyricism is unbelievably impressive and her angelic voice is honestly compelling.

Please go listen to her if you haven't before!!



Both featured images taken by the author, of Erin LeCount.



Both featured images taken by the author, of Erin LeCount.

5 Tips for Winter Wellness

As wonderful as this time of year can be, the dark, long nights and societal expectations of what your December should look like can make you feel low, stressed and isolated. For this reason, I've complied some tips to prioritise your wellbeing over this holiday period.

1. Get some fresh air.

I know it's cold and dark at 4pm, and probably raining too, but even just a 5-minute walk to your local park or corner-shop can help you to get out of your head (and your room). Soak up the winter air and feel your toes get numb, listen to your favourite playlist or finally answer your friend's voice note from last week.

2. Reach out to a loved one.

On the subject of answering your friend's messages, it can be easy to get out of touch with your friends and family, but no one should struggle alone. As well as presents it's important to also be present – show up for your loved ones and remember that there isn't any shame in feeling down. Sharing how you feel lightens the burden you're carrying, hardships always ease, and better and brighter days are in the future.

3. Take some time for yourself.

It can be easy to get overwhelmed and taking time for yourself is a good antidote. Make a hot drink (my preference is hot chocolate with lots of whipped cream) settle under a nice warm blanket and do something for you. This could be reading a book on your TBR list, watching a film or series or pick up a new craft. Doing something with your hands like colouring, knitting or crocheting can be a good way to get out of your head and focus on something else.

4. Have a digital detox.

Comparison is the thief of joy, and a wise man (Skepta) once produced an album called Ignorance is Bliss. If you're finding yourself sitting with feelings of jealousy and resentment when scrolling online it might be a sign to take some time off from your phone. It is so easily forgotten that what we see online isn't the whole picture of other people's reality, unfollow or mute accounts that don't make you feel good about yourself and spend an afternoon doing something other than doomscrolling.

5. Do something nice for someone else.

Whilst it's important to fill up your own cup, an act of goodwill for someone else can help you remain grateful and remember the privileged position we live in compared to war zones across the world. Buy a friend a coffee, your mum some flowers or a hot lunch for someone sleeping rough on the street. Equally there are many charity organisations for causes globally and in the UK for those who are less fortunate.

I've included some links to some charity organisations and wellbeing resources if you or anyone you know needs them. Stay safe and have a good holiday.

Love Nawal

[Donate to Unicef's Children in Gaza Appeal](#)

[Donate to Save the Children](#)

[Samaritans Website](#)

[Mind's website](#)

A NOTE FROM YOUR HEAD EDITOR

THANKS SO MUCH FOR READING
THIS ISSUE OF THE ASTON
CANON. WE ARE ALWAYS
LOOKING FOR MORE STUDENTS
TO GET INVOLVED, IF YOU'RE
INTERESTED BE SURE TO
MESSAGE US ON INSTAGRAM
AND GIVE US A FOLLOW
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