



Christmas,
A time of Symbols
and Tradition BUT
WHERE DID IT ALL
START...

A bit of history...

- ▣ According to the Venerable Bede in his History of the English Church, the legendary King Arthur was crowned by St Dubricius on Christmas Day
- ▣ In the year 816, the Council of Chelsea enforced the observance of Christmas on December 25th in Britain. This date was formerly called 'Mothers Night, a vigil in honour of the re-birth of the new sun, so it had been deemed easy to replace it with the birth of the Son of God.
- ▣ PEACE AND GOODWILL: During the reign of the Saxon King Ethelred 991-1016- a law was made that the season of the Nativity should be a time of peace and goodwill, when all strife must end.
- ▣ WHEN THE NATIVITY BECAME 'CHRISTMAS' Until c1170, the festival was always referred to as 'In Festis Nativitatis' Or 'Natalis' The Feast of the Nativity. The anglicised 'Christes-Masse' did not appear until after the Norman invasion.

Yule Logs and Candles

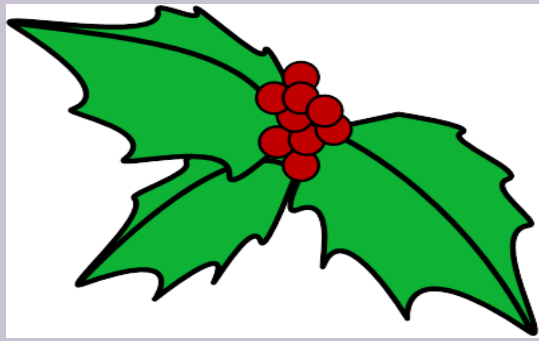
- ▣ The most important date in the festive season for Pagans was the winter solstice which always took place around December 21. Called Yule, it is one of the traditional Celtic fire festivals and marks the return of the light after the longest night of the year.
- ▣ Druids kept a Yule log burning for 12 days during the winter solstice—a symbolic light to guide them through the harsh winter.



Christians too

- ▣ One of the earliest records of candles being used at Christmas is from the middle ages, where a large candle was used to represent the star of Bethlehem.
- ▣ In medieval times it was customary to represent Christ the Lord by a burning candle. It was placed in the centre of a laurel wreath and kept burning every night during the holy season.





Christmas Decorations



- ❑ Christmas trees were important Christian and pagan symbols. Symbolised the return of life in the spring.
- ❑ Druids believed good spirits lived in the branches of the holly; Christian church believed holly berries had been white and that the blood of Christ turned them red
- ❑ Ivy was never used to decorate churches—associated with Bacchus, God of wine and revelry.
- ❑ Vikings hung fir trees with war trophies!

Mistletoe –a mixed history!



- ❑ Norse mythology recounts how the god Balder was killed using a mistletoe arrow by his rival god Hoder while fighting for the female Nanna.
- ❑ Druid rituals used mistletoe to poison their human sacrificial victims.
- ❑ There are lots of legends and traditions surrounding mistletoe, the most well known and popular being the kissing one. It was believed that kissing under the mistletoe would lead to marriage.
- ❑ Druids believed that mistletoe would bring good luck and health.
- ❑ There has also been a tradition that a good crop of mistletoe is a sign that there will be a good harvest in the following season.

Then there's the Christmas cards...



- ▣ The custom of sending Christmas cards was started in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole. He was a civil servant who was very interested in the new 'Public Post Office' and wondered how it could be used more by ordinary people.
- ▣ Sir Henry had the idea of Christmas Cards with his friend John Horsley, who was an artist. They designed the first card and sold them for 1 shilling each.
- ▣ The first postal service that ordinary people could use was started in 1840 when the first 'Penny Post' public postal deliveries began.

A Portly Bearded Man and a chimney..!

- ▣ Based on St Nicholas, an anonymous gift giver around AD 270
- ▣ The Dutch tradition was SINTAKLAAS
- ▣ In his satiric 1809 book *A History of New York*, Washington Irving described Santa as a portly, bearded man who smokes a pipe.



- ▣ In 1890, Massachusetts businessman James Edgar became the FIRST shop Santa, according to *The Smoking Jacket*.
- ▣ The first mention of a spouse for Santa was in the 1849 short story *A Christmas Legend* by James Rees.

Christmas Stockings...



- ▣ The practice of stocking-stuffing can be traced back to St Nicholas' charitable donations in the 4th century.
- ▣ Beyond St. Nick, the practice can be traced back to Scandinavian countries that still held their Pagan beliefs. Children would leave their shoes full of carrots, straw, or other similar foods for Odin's mythic horse, Sleipnir. When Sleipnir ate the food, Odin would leave candy or other treats in their place.

What DO you buy people for Christmas?

- ▣ Presents–reminded people of the gifts the 3 kings brought
- ▣ Monarchs bestowed gifts on members of the Court
- ▣ Relics were gifted to Churches
- ▣ In 1470 George Neville was given a Dukedom AND the hand of Elizabeth of York as a way of pacifying Yorkists!
- ▣ Richard III and his wife spent £1200 on new clothes and gifts for the Court!



But the poor got.....

- ▣ The poor received money from their masters in clay pots with a slit on the top
- ▣ They had to be broken to get the money out
- ▣ They were nicknamed..... 'PIGGIES'
- ▣ The origins of PIGGY BANKS!



Christmas Carols

A pagan story!



- ❑ Carols were banned in Churches in Medieval Times; they were considered pagan and lewd!.
- ❑ So singers took the idea of Carol literally, it means to dance in a circle and they went into the street to perform which is where the tradition of singers going from house to house comes from!
- ❑ Like 'trick or treat' at Halloween, Carollers used to threaten a curse if they weren't rewarded with food and drink!
- ❑ St Francis of Assisi adopted an 'if you can't beat them, join them' approach in the later middle ages and introduced carol singing again

If you think WE eat too much...!

- ▣ Edward IV had massive feast in 1482; 2000 people attended
- ▣ They had Boar and Gilded Peacock
- ▣ Boar was Richard III favourite AND it was his personal emblem
- ▣ Peacock was tough and not tasty but really expensive according to records kept by the London Poultry Guild



But where are the peasants...!



Their Goose was cooked....!



- ▣ Eating Goose at Christmas is said to have originated with Elizabeth I who was eating goose when she heard about the defeat of the Armada! She is said to have decreed that Goose should be served at Christmas to mark the event.
- ▣ The poor could buy a ready cooked goose from the Church (!) for 7p or an uncooked goose for 6p- a days wages

Turkeys Herasays Hops and Beer

- ▣ There is a very old country rhyme from the 13thC, "Turkeys Herasays Hops and Beer, all came to England in one year!" Although a lovely saying, not all of it is accurate.
- ▣ Turkeys actually came in the 16thC, when an enterprising young trader called William Strickland imported six wild turkeys into England (into the port of Bristol)
- ▣ They sold like wild fowl!!



But the poor would eat.....

- ▣ Venison was on a Lord's menu and some Lords gave their workers the leftovers
- ▣ The UMBLES- heart/liver/tongue/ears and brains
- ▣ These would be mixed with whatever poor people could get and made into a pie!

▣ UMBLE PIE!



Mince Pies and Christmas Pudding



- ▣ A large mince pie might be baked....filled with shredded meat, spices and fruit. It was only in Victorian times that the meat was left out
- ▣ Baked in oblong casing representing the crib; the cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg represented the 3 gifts the Magi gave the child Jesus
- ▣ Christmas Pudding; FRUMENTY made of thick porridge, currents and dried fruit, spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg; served cold. LOVELY...!

A medieval baker, c1465



We'll drink a Toast...

- ❑ Wassail comes from Anglo Saxon meaning to be well (*WAES HAEL*)– a strong hot drink (ale/honey/spices)– toast given by the host and the reply was
- ❑ *DRINK HAEL* means drink and be well
- ❑ The Wassail bowl was kept full between Xmas and 12th Night



He's behind you....!

- ▣ Very little was written down before the 16th century BUT from drawings and manuscripts–
- ▣ Mummers and Guisers sang and performed plays, especially for the Courts
- ▣ Actors performed in villages...the origins of Panto



Christmas Crackers!



- ❑ William the Conqueror was crowned on Christmas Day 1066
- ❑ Christmas day was a 'Quarter Day' when the poor had to pay their rent!
- ❑ Oliver Cromwell tried to ban Christmas frivolity. The law wasn't lifted until 1660.
- ❑ Robins on cards were a joke 150 years ago when postmen wore red tunics and were named after them.

More crackers!

- US scientists calculated that Santa would have to visit 822 homes a second to deliver all the world's presents on Christmas Eve, travelling at 650 miles a second.
- The tradition of putting tangerines in stockings comes from 12th-century French nuns who left socks full of fruit, nuts and tangerines at the houses of the poor.
- Hanging stockings out comes from the Dutch custom of leaving shoes packed with food for St Nicholas's donkeys. He would leave small gifts in return.
- Gold-wrapped chocolate coins commemorate St Nicholas who gave bags of gold coins to the poor.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS
EVERYONE!!

