



VACANT CHAIR SHELLHOLE



Edition December 2016

Morning all, trust you are fit and well Can you believe it is that time of the year again less than a month to Christmas & New Year, hope all the Christmas Shopping is done and that you have your list of New year resolutions Please remember those less fortunate especially this time of year. To be thankful for the countless Blessings, the joy of singing Christmas Carols, and being around loved one's

Were you one of those that ventured out on Black Friday (25/11/2016) for all the so called "specials" with all the "trolley rage" fighting pushing, is it really worth it, and also spend money you perhaps you don't have.

Rugby sorry not really a topic of conversation, but I am still a loyal supporter, I am sure there are a lot of teams that have gone through the same scenario.

For those of you are travelling over this Festive time enjoy the rest and enjoy this time with family and come back safely. Due to the holidays the editor is also taking a break so there will be no Newsletter for January 2017

We would like to wish the following persons and anyone that we may have forgotten who celebrate their birthdays in December 2016 and January 2017 a very



December 2016

7th – Beryl Howie

8th – Sue Knox-Davies

16th – Ben Veenemans

18th – Bleign Knox-Davies

23rd – Piet Marais

24th – Ben Lombard

25th – Mike Badenhorst

January 2017

1st – Norman Veitch (104th Birthday)

1st – Tracy Heydenreich

11th – Danie Gouws

19th – Bill van Aardt

20th – Raymond de Scally

21st – Daline Thorold

The History of Christmas Trees



The evergreen fir tree has traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals (pagan and Christian) for thousands of years. Pagans used branches of it to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as it made them think of the spring to come. The Romans used Fir Trees to decorate their temples at the festival of Saturnalia. Christians use it as a sign of everlasting life with God.

Nobody is really sure when Fir trees were first used as Christmas trees. It probably began about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe. Many early Christmas Trees seem to have been hung upside down from the ceiling using chains (hung from chandeliers/lighting hooks).

Other early Christmas Trees, across many parts of northern Europe, were cherry or hawthorn plants (or a branch of the plant) that were put into pots and brought inside so they would hopefully flower at Christmas time. If you couldn't afford a real plant, people made pyramids of woods and they were decorated to look like a tree with paper, apples and candles. Sometimes they were carried around from house to house, rather than being displayed in a home.

It's possible that the wooden pyramid trees were meant to be like Paradise Trees. These were used in medieval German Mystery or Miracle Plays that were acted out in front of Churches on Christmas Eve. In early church calendars of saints, 24th December was Adam and Eve's day. The Paradise Tree represented the Garden of Eden. It was

often paraded around the town before the play started, as a way of advertising the play.

The plays told Bible stories to people who could not read.

The first documented use of a tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations is argued between the cities of Tallinn in Estonia and Riga in [Latvia](#)! Both claim that they had the first trees; Tallinn in 1441 and Riga in 1510. Both trees were put up by the 'Brotherhood of Blackheads' which was an association of local unmarried merchants, ship owners, and foreigners in Livonia (what is now Estonia and Latvia).

Little is known about either tree apart from that they were put in the town square, were dance around by the Brotherhood of Blackheads and were then set on fire. This is like the custom of the [Yule Log](#). The word used for the 'tree' could also mean a mast or pole, tree might have been like a 'Paradise Tree' or a tree-shaped wooden candelabra rather than a 'real' tree.

In the town square of Riga, the capital of Latvia, there is a plaque which is engraved with "The First New Year's Tree in Riga in 1510", in eight languages.

A picture from Germany in 1521 which shows a tree being paraded through the streets with a man riding a horse behind it. The man is dressed a bishop, possibly representing St. Nicholas.

In 1584, the historian Balthasar Russow wrote about a tradition, in Riga, of a decorated fir tree in the market square where the young men "went with a flock of maidens and women, first sang and danced there and then set the tree aflame". There's a record of a small tree in Breman, Germany from 1570. It is described as a tree decorated with "apples, nuts, dates, pretzels and paper flowers". It was displayed in a 'guild-house' (the meeting place for a society of business men in the city).

The first person to bring a Christmas Tree into a house, in the way we know it today, may have been the 16th century German preacher Martin Luther. A story is told that, one night before Christmas, he was walking through the forest and looked up to see the stars shining through the tree branches. It was so beautiful, that he went home and told his children that it reminded him of Jesus, who left the stars of heaven to come to earth at Christmas. Some people say this is the same tree as the 'Riga' tree, but it isn't! The

Riga tree originally took place a few decades earlier. Northern Germany and Latvia are neighbors.

Another story says that St. Boniface of Crediton (a village in Devon, UK) left England and travelled to [Germany](#) to preach to the pagan German tribes and convert them to Christianity. He is said to have come across a group of pagans about to sacrifice a young boy while worshipping an oak tree. In anger, and to stop the sacrifice, St. Boniface is said to have cut down the oak tree and, to his amazement, a young fir tree sprang up from the roots of the oak tree. St. Boniface took this as a sign of the Christian faith and his followers decorated the tree with candles so that St. Boniface could preach to the pagans at night.

There is another legend, from Germany, about how the Christmas Tree came into being, it goes:

Once on a cold Christmas Eve night, a forester and his family were in their cottage gathered round the fire to keep warm. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. When the forester opened the door, he found a poor little boy standing on the door step, lost and alone. The forester welcomed him into his house and the family fed and washed him and put him to bed in the youngest sons own bed (he had to share with his brother that night!). The next morning, Christmas Morning, the family were woken up by a choir of angels, and the poor little boy had turned into Jesus, the Christ Child. The Christ Child went into the front garden of the cottage and broke a branch off a Fir tree and gave it to the family as a present to say thank you for looking after him. So ever since them, people have remembered that night by bringing a Christmas tree into their



homes!

In Germany, the first Christmas Trees were decorated with edible things, such as gingerbread and gold covered apples. Then glass makers made special small ornaments similar to some of the decorations used today. In 1605 an unknown German wrote: "At Christmas they set up fir trees in the parlours of Strasbourg and hang thereon roses cut out of many-coloured paper, apples, wafers, gold foil, sweets, etc."

At first, a figure of the Baby Jesus was put on the top of the tree. Over time it changed to an angel/fairy that told the shepherds about Jesus, or a star like the Wise Men saw.

The first Christmas Trees came to Britain sometime in the 1830s. They became very popular in 1841, when Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's German husband) had a Christmas Tree set up in Windsor Castle. In 1848, drawing of "The Queen's Christmas tree at Windsor Castle" was published in the Illustrated London News. The drawing was republished in Godey's Lady's Book, Philadelphia in December 1850 (but they removed the Queen's crown and Prince Albert's moustache to make it look 'American!').

The publication of the drawing helped Christmas Trees become popular in the UK and USA.

In Victorian times, the tree would have been decorated with candles to represent stars.

In many parts of Europe, candles are still used to decorate Christmas trees.

Tinsel and The Legend of the Christmas Spider

Tinsel was also created in Germany, were it was originally made from thin strips of beaten silver. But when plastic/man made tinsel was invented, it became very popular as it was much cheaper than real silver and also lighter to go on the tree!

There are also folk stories about how tinsel was created - by The Christmas Spider! These tales seem to have started in Eastern Germany or [Ukraine](#) but are also told in parts of Finland and Scandinavia. The stories are now also popular in other countries such as the USA; although I live in the UK and most people in my country have never heard of the story/legend!

All the versions of the story involve a poor family who can't afford to decorate a Tree for Christmas (in some versions the tree grew from a pine cone in their house, in others the family have bought a tree into the house). When the children go to sleep on Christmas Eve a spider covers the tree in cobwebs. Then on Christmas morning the cobwebs are magically turned into silver and gold strands which decorate the tree!

Some versions of the story say that it's the light of the sun which changed the cobwebs into silver and gold but other versions say it's St Nicholas / Santa Claus / Father Christmas / das Christkind which made the magic happen.

In parts of Germany, Poland, and Ukraine it's meant to be good luck to find a spider or a spider's web on your Christmas Tree. Spider's web Christmas Tree decorations are also popular in Ukraine. They're called 'pavuchky' (which means 'little spider') and the decorations are normally made of paper and silver wire. You might even put an artificial spider's web on your tree!

Christmas Tree Lights



Because of the danger of fire, in 1895 Ralph Morris, an American telephonist, invented the first electric Christmas lights, similar to the ones we use today.

In 1885 a hospital in Chicago burned down because of candles on a Christmas Tree! And in 1908 insurance companies in the USA tried to get a law made that would ban candles from being used on Christmas Trees because of the many fires they had caused! So we have to say a big thank you to Ralph Morris for making Christmas safer!

The most lights lit at the same time on a Christmas tree is 194,672 and was done by Kiwanis Malmedy / Haute Fagnes Belgium in Malmedy, Belgium, on 10/12/2010!

Many towns and villages have their own Christmas Trees. One of the most famous is the tree in Trafalgar Square in London, England, which is given to the [UK](#) by [Norway](#) every year as a 'thank you' present for the help the UK gave Norway in World War II.

The White House in the [USA](#) has had a big tree on the front lawn since the 1920s.

The record for the most Christmas trees chopped down in two minutes is 27 and belongs to Erin Lavoie from the USA. She set the record on 19th December 2008 on the set of Guinness World Records: Die GroBten Weltrekorde in Germany.

Artificial Christmas Trees really started becoming popular in the early 20th century. In the Edwardian period Christmas Trees made from colored ostrich feathers were popular at 'fashionable' parties. Around 1900 there was even a short fashion for white trees - so if you thought colored trees are a new invention they're not! Over the years artificial trees have been made from feathers, papier mâché, metal, glass, and many different types of plastic (I've got a couple of inflatable trees!).

The tallest artificial Christmas tree was 52m (170.6ft) high and was covered in green PVC leaves!. It was called the 'Peace Tree' and was designed by Grupo Sonae Distribuição Brasil and was displayed in Moinhos de Vento Park, Porto Alegre, Brazil from 1st December 2001 until 6th January 2002.

In many countries, different trees are used as Christmas trees. In New Zealand a tree called the 'Pohutakawa' that has red flowers is sometimes used and in [India](#), Banana or Mango trees are sometimes decorated.

Here are 50 festive facts to get you even more in the mood for Christmas...

1 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.

2 ROBINS on cards were a joke 150 years ago when postmen wore red tunics and were named after them.

3 ALTHOUGH now mostly vegetarian, in Victorian times, mince pies were made with beef and spices.

4 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.

5 DESPITE the tale of three wise men paying homage to baby Jesus, the Bible never gives a number. Matthew's Gospel refers to merely "wise men".

6 CAROLS began as an old English custom called wassailing, toasting neighbours to a long life.

7 CAROLS weren't sung in churches until they were introduced by St Francis of Assisi in the 13th century.

8 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.

9 THERE is no reference to angels singing anywhere in the Bible.

10 NEARLY 60 million Christmas trees are grown each year in Europe.

11 THE word Noel derives from the French expression "les bonnes nouvelles" or "the good news".

12 JESUS was probably born in a cave and not a wooden stable, say Biblical scholars.

13 THE abbreviation Xmas isn't irreligious. The letter X is a Greek abbreviation for Christ.

14 THE world's tallest Xmas tree at 221ft high was erected in a Washington shopping mall in 1950.

15 THE chances of a white Christmas are just 1 in 10 for England and Wales, and 1 in 6 for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

16 MANY theologians estimate that Jesus wasn't born on December 25 but sometime in September between 6BC and 30AD.

17 JAMES Pierpont's 1857 song Jingle Bells was first called One Horse Open Sleigh and was written for Thanksgiving.

18 BEFORE turkey, the traditional Christmas meal in England was a pig's head and mustard.

19 IN 1647, after the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell banned festivities. The law wasn't lifted until 1660.

20 In 1999, residents of the state of Maine in America built the world's biggest ever snowman. He stood at 113ft tall.

21 THE Greeks celebrate Christmas on January 7, according to the old Julian calendar, while Xmas presents are opened on New Year's Day.

22 MANY parts of the Christmas tree can actually be eaten, with the needles being a good source of Vitamin C.

23 THE holly in a wreath symbolises Christ's crown of thorns while the red berries are drops of his blood.

24 THE first commercial Christmas cards were commissioned by civil servant Sir Henry Cole in London in 1843. Featuring a family drinking wine, one sold for £8,469 last year.

25 HANGING presents on trees may come from the Druids who believed the tree was the giver of all good things.

26 THE largest Christmas cracker - 45.72m long and 3.04m in diameter - was pulled in Australia in 1991.

27 THE long shopping spree before Christmas began in America when relatives of soldiers posted overseas in the Second World War were encouraged to mail gifts early.

28 JINGLE Bells was the first song broadcast from space when Gemini 6 astronauts Tom Stafford and Wally Schirra sang it on December 16, 1965.

29 ASTRONOMERS believe the Star Of Bethlehem, which guided the wisemen to Jesus, may have been a comet or the planet Uranus.

30 SANTA has different names around the world - Kriss Kringle in Germany, Le Befana in Italy, Pere Noel in France and Deushka Moroz (Grandfather Frost) in Russia.

31 THE word Christmas comes from the Old English "Cristes maesse" meaning "Christ's Mass".

32 THE bestselling Xmas single ever is Bing Crosby's White Christmas, shifting over 50million copies worldwide since 1942.

33 IN Britain, the best-selling festive single is Band Aid's 1984 track, Do They Know It's Christmas?, which sold 3.5million copies. Wham! is next in the same year with Last Christmas, selling 1.4million.

34 UPSIDE-down artificial Xmas trees are sold to allow more gifts to be piled under.

35 SINCE 1947 Oslo has sent an Xmas tree to London to thank us for our help in the Second World War.

36 CHRISTMAS pudding was originally a soup made with raisins and wine.

37 LONDON sweetmaker Tom Smith created the first Christmas crackers in 1847, based on the sweet wrapper design.

38 SANTA Claus comes from a Dutch folk tale based on Saint Nicholas, or Sinterklaas, who gave gifts on December 6.

39 BOXING Day gets its name from all the money collected in church alms-boxes for the poor.

39 KISSING under the mistletoe is thought to spring from Frigga, the Norse goddess of love, who was associated with the plant.

41 THE Beatles hold the record for most Xmas number 1 singles, topping the charts in 1963, 65 and 67.

42 ELECTRIC tree lights were invented by Edward Johnson in the US in 1882.

43 THEY may date back to pagan traditions, but the earliest known reference to a Christmas tree is in a German pamphlet from 1570.

44 THE highest-grossing festive movie is 2000's How The Grinch Stole Christmas, which has raked in £175m so far.

45 THERE are 13 Santas in Iceland, each leaving a gift for children. They come down from the mountain one by one, starting on December 12 and have names like Spoon Licker, Door Sniffer and Meat Hook.

46 RUDOLPH the red-nosed reindeer was invented for a US firm's Christmas promotion in 1938.

47 GOLD-wrapped chocolate coins commemorate St Nicholas who gave bags of gold coins to the poor.

48 THE first Christmas celebrated in Britain is thought to have been in York in 521AD.

49 IN Greece, Italy, Spain and Germany, workers get a Christmas bonus of one month's salary by law.

50 IN the Czech Republic they enjoy dinners of fish soup, eggs and carp. The number of people at the table must be even, or the one without a partner will die next year.



Jokes

JO What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire?

Frostbite!

What do snowmen wear on their heads?

Ice caps!

How do snowmen get around?

They ride an icicle!

Who hides in the bakery at Christmas?

A mince spy!

What did Adam say to his wife on the day before Christmas?

It's Christmas, Eve!

What do you get if you cross a bell with a skunk?

Jingle Smells!

What did Santa say to the smoker?

Please don't smoke, it's bad for my elf

Who delivers presents to baby sharks at Christmas?

Santa Jaws

Why did Santa's helper see the doctor?

Because he had a low "elf" esteem!

What kind of motorbike does Santa ride?

A Holly Davidson!

What do you call a cat in the desert?

Sandy Claws!



Wishing you and your family a Merry Christmas & Prosperous New Year

Compiled By Lynne Salter