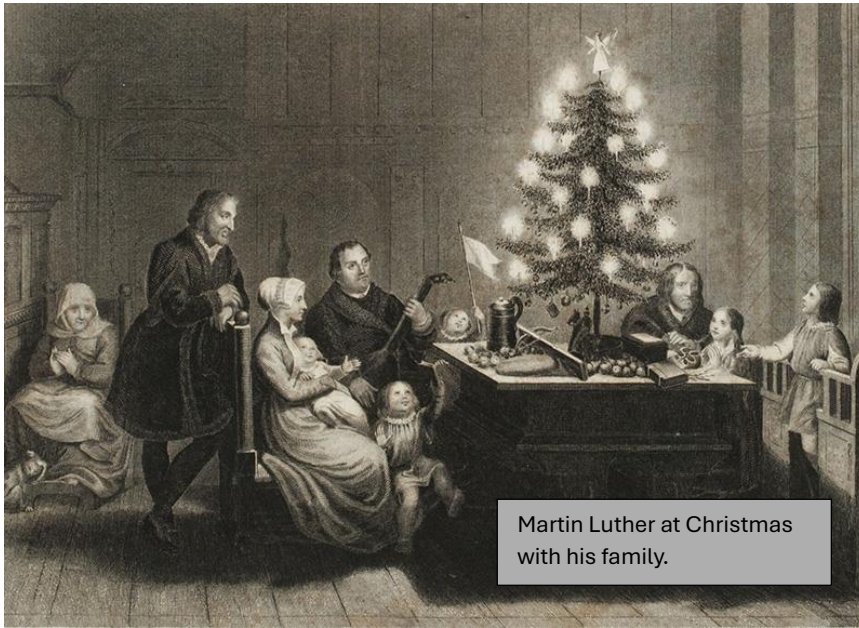


The Christmas Tree



A popular perception that bringing a pine tree indoors at Christmas, dates from the Victorian period when Prince Albert began the practice in 1846. The Illustrated London News carried a sketch of Queen Victoria and her husband and children standing around a candle-lit tree at Buckingham Palace.

The practice was rapidly adopted by the population and also influenced attitudes towards indoor decorations in America, where the early puritan leaders had generally viewed Christmas celebrations as being unholy.

The nineteenth century fashion-conscious East Coast American society put paid to the matter, as they were keen to follow what was being done in the English Court. Very soon, Christmas ornaments were being imported from Germany and their trees extended from the floor to the ceiling.

Most early Americans had seen them as pagan symbols and even attempted to make it a penal offence to hang decorations. In 1659 laws were enacted in Massachusetts to make any frivolity on Christmas day an offence.



As far back as 1747, the newly arrived Moravian Germans in Pennsylvania were cutting small trees for display and building community trees outside from wooden pyramids. Finally, an influx German and Irish immigrants in the 19th century undermined the Puritan legacy.

Ancient societies in the Northern Hemisphere have long revered the significance of the shortest day of the year and brought greenery into their homes to remind them of the time when new plants would grow again, ending the winter hunger-gap. Even the Egyptians would fill their homes with green palms and papyrus reeds, which symbolized for them the triumph of life over death.

The early Romans knew that the solstice meant that farms and orchards would soon be green and fruitful. To mark the occasion, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.



Saturnalia was celebrated in Rome from December 17 to 23, in honour of Saturn as God of the harvest. There was a great banquet and public party, financed by the State, which opened five days of parties in which there was waste, feasting and much more freedom was left to the slaves. The houses were decorated with candles, plants, flowers and, with what the Romans liked, surely garlands of colours. Families visited each other and gave each other gifts.



In Northern Europe the Druids, the priests of the ancient Celts, also decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The Vikings in Scandinavia honoured the evergreen mistletoe for its role in the death of the Balder, a god of light, when his blind brother accidentally speared him with a shaft made of mistletoe wood.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in AD 312 ended Roman persecution of Christians and began imperial patronage of the Christian churches. The earliest known reference to it commemorating the birth of Christ is in the Roman Philocalian calendar of AD 354. In the process, the festival of dies natalis solis invicti, 'birthday of the unconquered sun' merged with commemorating the birth of Christ on December 25th.



Germany is credited with starting the modern Christmas tree tradition as we now know it. By the 16th century various sources record devout Christians bringing decorated trees into their homes.

It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. According to a common version of the story, walking home one winter evening, Luther was awed by the stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the

scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.



By the early 20th Century most Christians decorated their trees with homemade ornaments and used apples and nuts and marzipan sweets. The dangerous practice of attaching lit candles to indoor trees finally ended with the introduction of strings of small electric lights, when Thomas Edison's assistants suggested the idea to him.



During the Second World War, Britain provided safe haven for the King of Norway and his government. Since 1947, each year Norway sends us a roughly 20 metre tall Norwegian Spruce. Other cities in the USA have similarly large trees. The Rockefeller Centre Christmas Tree dates back to the Depression era, with the first tree placed in 1931. It was a small unadorned tree set up by construction workers at the centre of the construction site. Two years later, another tree was placed there, this time with lights.



If you have not yet purchased your own indoor traditional Christmas Tree, check out your local Lympsham supplier: Oliver Eade Greenery – on Bridgwater Road near Copse Corner

07803 242583 www.edengreenery.co.uk