

Good Old Days – Christmas

The December presentation from Paul Harding was all about Christmas through the ages. As per usual it was a wonderful series of fascinating facts and anecdotes about Christmas introducing where things had come from and the links to pagan times but majoring on the Wartime Christmas.

Although Queen Victoria and Prince Albert made the Christmas Tree popular it was actually Queen Charlotte who first introduced the Christmas Tree from Germany to Great Britain. People used lit candles on the trees to provide some of the sparkle, on such thing as Health and Safety then! The Yule Log came from Pagan times where a large log was burnt on the fire but as it came down through the years the fire element was represented by putting candles on the log on the table or even the more modern chocolate covered cake.



During WW2 magazines like the Boy's Own provided many ideas for making cheap Christmas



decorations, like the paper chains in the photo. In the first couple of years people were able to buy decorations but they soon disappeared as factories moved over to helping the war effort. Christmas became a make do and mend event with home made cards, pictures cut from papers or magazines, decorations and home-made presents such as wooden toys for children. This helped promote a good feeling and Christmas was seen as a good time during the war. People made

crackers, they could buy the snappers and then use bits to create the barrel shape. At times the snappers were in short supply though because the Home Guard used them instead of ammunition when they were exercising.

In Victorian times families typically put their trees up on Christmas Eve and during the war people started doing things right at the last minute again. As they did not have our modern conveniences, such as fridges, they had to buy their food at the last minute. They would save bits of their ration allowance up, so they could have extra food and clothes for Christmas. Shops had to abide by the regulations to protect people from shattered glass by



putting tape across the windows and some organisations, such as Harrods, complained to the Government that this detracted from the displays they created for Christmas.

There were obvious gift shortages during, for example many of the best toys were made in Germany and these were no longer available. The top toy of the war years was Monopoly and children were given home-made knitted toys or wooden ones as already mentioned above. Each person would have a pillow case for their presents. Many people went to church on



Christmas morning before going home to prepare their Christmas dinner. In fact, church attendance increased significantly during the war years. The Christmas dinner included many substitutes such as rabbit and the magazines showed the housewives how to create 'mock goose' using rabbit or Spam. They also indulged in mock Christmas Pudding with mock cream, yummy! They would create large decorated Christmas cakes from cardboard, which they would lift to find a small non-descript cake inside. As there was a lack of dairy products, they used Liquid Paraffin to bind the cake together, double yummy!!

More fascinating talks from Paul will be taking place in church in the New Year so keep an eye out for news.