

DFHG

**DISS FAMILY HISTORY GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

December 2020 No.1

Whilst most of us are socially distancing I will be sending out more frequent Newsletters to keep you informed and busy. Please help by sending in your contributions. Thank you!

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Diss

CHRISTMAS SNIPPET NO.4

Why is mistletoe hung at Christmas?

Before it became a romantic symbol, [Mistletoe](#) was considered so sacred in ancient Britain that it could only be cut by druids with a golden sickle. The plant had connotations of peace, and people who met underneath it were forbidden from fighting, even if they were bitter enemies. Homes decorated with mistletoe offered shelter and protection to anyone who entered.

Even to this day it is very rare to see a sprig of mistletoe inside a church thanks to its Pagan leanings. To the druids of the old religions it was a potent symbol of fertility, and the Greeks and the Romans regularly parleyed peace beneath its boughs. From the Middle Ages our ancestors hung it above the threshold to ward off evil spirits, although the Victorians helped give the plant its modern, lip-smacking tradition. In the UK, the main mistletoe event of the year is the Tenbury Wells Mistletoe Festival

Why is holly associated with Christmas?

The barbed leaves and red berries of the holly plant have long been identified with eternal life and protection in Great Britain. At first the Christian church took a disapproving stance to holly, forbidding it from appearing in churches, but the spiky leaves still appeared in people's houses, as the red of the berries was thought to ward off witches. In the face of such popularity, the custom was sanctified, the leaves taken to represent Christ's crown of thorns, and the berries His blood. Of course, special care had to be taken with such a powerful and lucky plant and so the old decorations, which were traditionally taken down on Candlemas (2 February), were never thrown away, but burnt.

And the ivy...

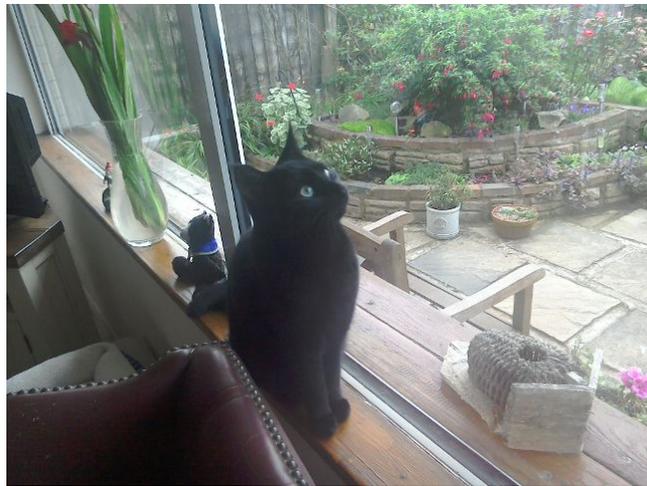
Ivy was the female plant to the male holly, and another symbol of everlasting life and resurrection. Interestingly the plant, now seen in a somewhat friendly light, was originally mistrusted. Folklore claimed that the vine could bring on madness and intoxication. In many counties, such as Northamptonshire, it had to be countered with

the beneficial holly; decorating your home with ivy alone brought bad luck in droves. Once again, you also had to be very careful about how you disposed of the ivy, but ever-pragmatic farmers used to feed the withered decorations to their cattle.

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CAT COMPETITION

Thank you to those who sent in pictures. Please decide the one you like best and email me the name shown under the picture. I need to have your emails by 5th December please so that the winner's name can be in the next Newsletter. Everyone has just one vote.



Annie



Flossie



Beta



Polo



Panda



Scrappy



Snowy



SuSu



Tinkerbelle



Bella

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A GEORGIAN CHRISTMAS

By Betty Morley

The Puritans had banned Christmas but after the restoration of Charles II festivities once again were in full swing. By the 18th century the Georgians had taken over and they really went to town, celebrating from 6th December until Twelfth Night, non-stop, mixing pagan and Christian traditions..

Everywhere were decorations of greenery – holly, ivy, mistletoe, laurel, rosemary. Kissing boughs made of holly, ivy and mistletoe, ribbons, apples and candles were hung everywhere. Special candles were made and Parson Woodforde says “I lighted my large wax candle being Christmas Day during teatime for about an hour”



The Yule Log would be lit on Christmas Eve and a roaring fire would burn. The Yule Log burned until Twelfth Night and if it went out before then there would be bad luck to the household..



THE YULE-LOG.

Queen Charlotte had a decorated Christmas Tree for her guests at Windsor in 1800. Lit by candles, the branches bore sweets, fruit, nuts and toys. Whether this became a tradition from then on we do not know but Queen Victoria and Prince Albert certainly had a decorated Christmas Tree in 1848 and following this it became a feature in most homes.

On St Thomas Day (21st December) poor women would go round their neighbourhood asking for food or money. Again from Parson Woodforde's diary "I had a great many poor people to visit me. I gave each of them that came sixpence."

Groups of poor people would go round singing traditional songs and offering a drink from their wassail bowl in exchange for food or money, this was known as "Wassailing". On Christmas Eve 1764 Parson Woodforde gave cider and two shillings in return for the singing of a Christmas Song, a carol and an anthem. He invited six or seven of the oldest men to Christmas dinner of roast beef and plum pudding.

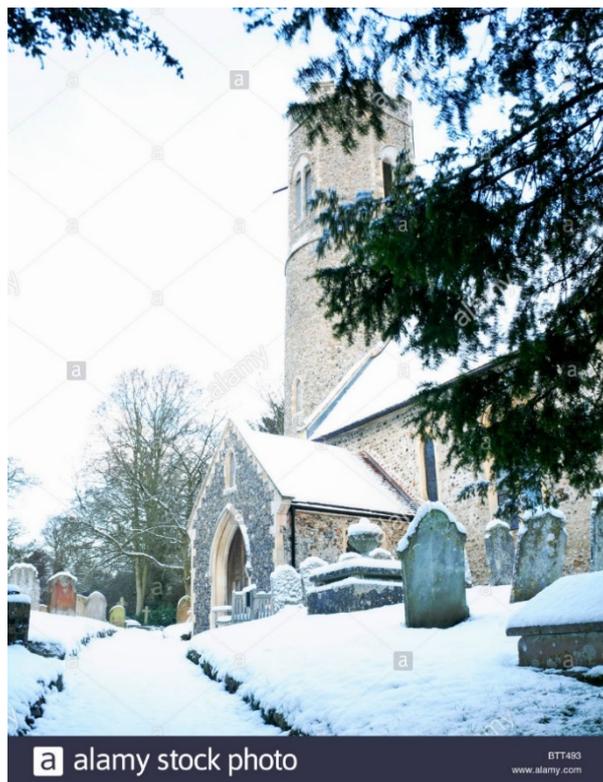


On St Stephens Day, 26th December, all servants and tradesmen received a Christmas Box, a tradition which has continued to the present day. Presents were exchanged between family and friends on St Nicholas Day, (5th December) New Years Day and Twelfth Night (6th January).

Rich food was consumed in abundance - Christmas Pies, Christmas Porridge made from "raisins, plums, spices, beer and wine", and always roast beef.



Church or chapel was always visited in the morning.



Then, after a huge dinner, the whole family and sometimes friends too, would play games together – from the energetic blind man’s buff to cards and dice.



The Christmas festivities were brought to a close with a magnificent Twelfth Night Party when there was dancing, games and of course eating and drinking. The piece de resistance was the Twelfth Night Cake which contained a pea and bean. Each guest received a slice of cake and the man who received the bean was “king” for the evening and the woman with the pea was the “queen”. (I don’t know what happened if the man received the pea and the woman the bean)



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CHRISTMAS SNIPPETT No.5



Why do we eat mince pies?

For good luck, British tradition recommends that everyone should eat a mince pie on each of the twelve days of Christmas. Tradition states that anyone who refuses one of their twelve pies will suffer a year of misfortune (you have been warned!)

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Keeping in touch The Royal Mail

By Wendy Beaney

We are all familiar with the mail and in these uncertain times perhaps with the help of the computer , telephone or post, order things to be delivered to our door. When we celebrate birthdays, weddings, religious festivals or to send condolences we use the post. We pop on a stamp, not so cheap now as the famous Penny Black.

How did our ancestors perhaps in the search of from the family home. things always stand out, the country and on the there is always a post The first of these was Sir Master of the Post by Henry V111 of course this service was only for the King and the Royal court.



keep in touch with loved ones who employment or military moved away As we research our family history two the fact that people did move about early census and trade directories master.

Brian Tuke knighted in 1516 as the In these times the post would have been carried by runners or horse riders,

Charles I opened the postal service to the public in 1635, later becoming a public service with the passage of the Post Office Act in 1660. A fragment of the act is as follows;-

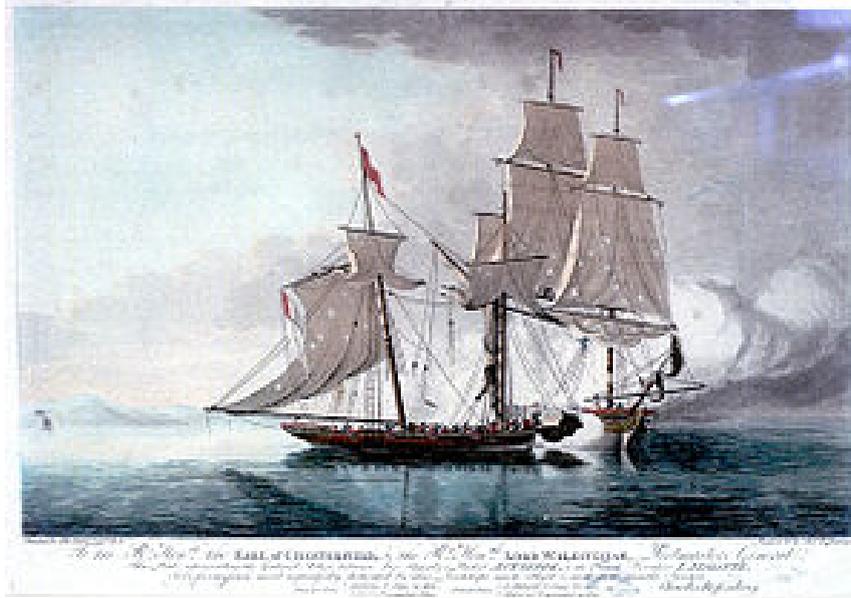
WHEREAS for the maintenance of mutuall Correspondencies and prevention of many Inconveniencies happening by private Posts severall publique Post Offices have beene heretofore erected for carrying and recarrying of Letters by Posts to and from all parts and places within England Scotland and Ireland and severall parts beyond the Seas the well ordering whereof is a matter of generall concernment, and of great advantage as well for preservation of Trade and Commerce as otherwise,

*For the port of every Letter not exceeding one sheate to or from any place not exceeding fowerscore English miles distant from the place where such Letter shall be received Two pence,
And for the like port of every Letter not exceeding two sheets Fower pence,
And for the like port of every Pacquet of Letters proportionably unto the said Rates,
And for the like port of every Packquet of Writts Deeds and other things after the Rate of Eight pence for every [one] ounce [weight]
And for all and every the letters pacquets and parcells of Goods that shall be carried or conveyed to, or from any of His Majestyes said Dominions to or from any other parts or places beyond the Seas according to the severall and respective rates that now are and have beene taken for letters pacquets and parcells soe conveyed being rated either by the Letter or by the Ounce weight. (all the original text, spellings etc.,)*

It was still a small organisation, however, employing just 45 sorting and delivery staff in London by 1665.

As early as the 17th century, mail was sent from Britain to the continent by ships known as packet boats. From 1660 they ran regularly from Harwich to Holland. This is because Holland was a major international trade partner for Britain. Other routes included Dover to Calais and Falmouth to Spain, Portugal and the West Indies. Both the ships and crew were contracted, not directly employed by Royal Mail. These times were often not safe to travel by sea. The packets and mail were attacked so often that there were official compensation rates for death or injury: £8 for a sailor's arm or leg, £4 for an eye.

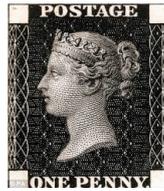
Officially, the captains of British packet ships were forbidden to engage larger ships in battle. But in 1793, the packet ship *Antelope* successfully fired on the French privateer *Atlanta* until she surrendered. Prior to this attack, the *Antelope* had been captured twice before, by the French, and ransomed back to the English. The crew successfully defended the mail and the packets on board and were hailed as heroes when they arrived back in England



Mariners of the 16th century took advantage of a system that started in Mossel Bay South Africa and a gnarled milk-wood tree. In 1500, one of the Commanders of Cabral ships, Pedro De Ataide, left a letter of importance in an iron pot shoe under this large tree on his return journey from the East. This letter was found by Commander of the third East India Fleet, Joao De Nova in 1501 when he was on his way to India. This is how the post office system started here. Today the famous Post Office Tree lives on with a letter box set within a stone and flint shoe where visitors can post home to family and friends. An elderly neighbour of mine who had been a merchant mariner during ww2, told me the story of this tree and when visiting South Africa I was fortunate enough to visit the site and duly post a card home.



The postal service underwent some of which were outlined Hill. His proposals included country based on weight, and adhesive stamp in 1840 – the Victoria.



significant reforms in the 1800s, and overseen by Sir Rowland setting postal rates across the introducing the world's first Penny Black, depicting Queen

The Penny Black stamp made it more affordable to send post, and in the years that followed there were large increases in the amount of mail being sent - from 67 million in 1839 to 242 million by 1844.

Over the years, the way post has been transported by Royal Mail has changed too. Post-boys carried mail on horseback between towns in the 1500s, but by the late 1700s horse-drawn coaches with Royal Mail livery transported post.

The use of homing pigeons to carry messages is as old as the ancient Persians from whom the art of training the birds probably came. This method was then used successfully in the wars. In a conflict of the size and duration of World War I, communication was key. Unfortunately, technology—like the telephone or the telegraph—was not as reliable as the commanders of Europe would have liked. In an attempt to improve combat communications, the leaders of World War I turned to a much older form of communication: the carrier pigeon. One of the most impressive things about the war records of the carrier pigeons was how widely the birds were used. Their service as battlefield messengers is their most known use, and the pigeons found homes in every branch of service.



Thousands of women were recruited to replace men fighting in World War One, a special women's uniform was introduced in 1915, featuring a straw hat and in 1941 the General Post Office approved women's trousers, named "Cameron's" after postwoman Jean Cameron who requested their introduction.

Other unusual methods of postal transportation include donkeys, which were used to carry mail up the steep High Street in Clovelly, Devon, during the 1900s. Also used in rural Ireland.



This is a postman in the Republic of Ireland.

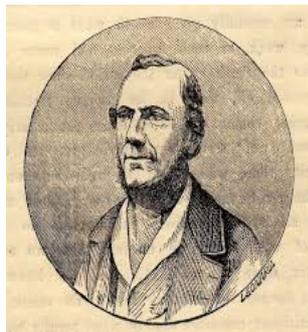
Uniform has always played its part in the evolution of Royal Mail, changing from the gold braided scarlet coat and black top hat of the 18th Century London letter carriers to the distinctive red waistcoat of postmen in the mid-1800s.

The postmen's red waistcoats were so recognisable that by the mid-1800s Christmas cards began to feature 'robin redbreasts' as a symbol of the men who delivered them.



Today we have postcodes to help the post person locate our letter box and the vehicles are still the postal red as the post carriages where of times gone by. Though the postal service is known cruelly as the 'snail mail' due to the fast e-mail one thing I am certain of is that it still has a future. When the internet goes down we can still pop on a stamp, walk to the familiar red letterbox and communicate with the outside world. We can send parcels to the rest of the world safe in the knowledge that the postal service will endeavour to deliver it for us.

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Orlando Whistlercraft
Rural Gleanings of
December

By Wendy Beaney

We are taken back to Orlando's observations that were published in 1851.
"The dark days before Christmas" now reign and the sable curtain of dense vapour pervades, all is gloom and murky skies, with occasional gales and drifting

rains. Still, as with all our other months, great exceptions at times occur. In 1838 much sun and dusty roads. In 1842, soft breezes, fine and serene atmosphere. In 1843 a remarkable dryness throughout, high Barometer and dusty road! In 1848, some days of pure sunshine and extreme mildness in the middle of the month. The coldest instances were 1796, 1798, 1799, 1819, 1829, 1840, 1844 and 1846. The late Dr Hamilton of Ipswich noted the thermometer at 2 degrees on the 25th December 1796, in his garden in the Town! And the late Thomas Pallant Esq., noted it below zero at Harleston, Norfolk December 31st 1799.

The lowest Barometer on record, occurred on December 25th 1821 and during that month the weather was extremely mild with frequent wind, rain, thunder and lightning. The last storm period begins on the 22nd and there is generally a change of weather at that time, most frequently the first considerable cold sets in soon after, but gales and rain usually attend the solstice on the 21st.

Chrysanthema deck the garden and the bright berries of the Holly bush are beautiful objects in the barren plain at this season and remind us of the return of the festive day, which, in all ages has been celebrated by all grades of society.

The schoolboys days of joy again return, and once more they come to the embrace of their fond parents, again to resume their round of happy engagements under their native roof or among their many good old relatives and friends. The multitude of agreeable associations connected with the “breaking up time”, each one can better conceive for himself than any pen can describe.

The Blackbird, Thrush, House sparrow, Green Linnet, Titmice of each kind, the common Wren and Red-breast are becoming very neighbourly among us. The Thrush in mild weather is very musical even in this month.

“*The old year out and the new one in,*” is another period of note with many and it is right, so far as is prudent and reasonable, to make merry, if it can be done wisely; but it is also very proper that we should, at each year’s end, call to mind the lesson which it is calculated to teach us. A host of reflections must arise when we glide over the 31st of December and each one may say to himself – Alas, there is another mile-stone overshot in my pilgrimage! In boyhood, each year appears a long interval, especially as we then anxiously look forward to the fancied period of freedom from discipline. In youth we gradually feel the swiftness of time from our becoming rather more employed.

The pleasure of Grandmothers garden and orchard are past for one year but her plum pudding, is at this time, the centre of attraction, in the circle of merry folk. The old Chimney corner, the ancient cupboard and the Christmas box at her hands, are all matters of deep thought, and every time she bestows the coin it is

accompanied by a fond sigh and solemn declaration that, “perhaps that will be the last!”.

Subject. –Moon and Stars –Christmas and its Enjoyments – Praise to God – Exhortation to Charity.

*December comes with short and gloomy days,
And rigid Winter now his sceptre sways;
Yet Cynthia fair, and spangled are at night,
Afford a striking and delightful sight;
When Boreas' icy gale unveils the sky,
Unfolding orbs to the observer's eye.
The rural feast the sadden'd heart revives,
For Christmas! welcome festival, arrives.
The stately oxen yield for man their life,
Humbly submitting to the sharpen'd knife:
With viands rich the table is supplied,
And ev'ry friend's invited to its side,
To taste the various dainties that abound;
The hollow walls with merry chat resound.
But while so jovial, frolicsome and gay,
Think of what happen'd on this sacred day;
What joyful news the shepherds heard at morn,
In Bethlehem a Saviour should be born.
Praise him who leads each planetary sphere,
That mighty God who brings you through the year:
And ye who access to sumptuous fare,
Give unto those who indigent appear;
For know! 't was given you for that intent,
Be grateful then, and learn to be content.*



After thought: Though Dickens made the white Christmas traditional it would appear that there have only been 13 in East Anglia, since 1960 according to a

chart I found it would seem that when we changed to the Gregorian Calendar it set Christmas back by 12 days.

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THE TOWN CRIER

By Jenny Jenkins



On 13th May 2014 the Diss Group was delighted to welcome Mike Wabe in his recent incarnation as The Town Crier of Thetford. Mike, attired in one of his three official liveries, complete with tricorne hat and hand bell, spoke on the history and origins of the Town Crier or bellman as they were sometimes known, through the ages from ancient Greece when news was relayed by the Spartan runners until the end of the 19th century when the need for them gradually died out.

Not a lot is known about them prior to the Norman conquest but they are depicted on the Bayeaux Tapestry. In 1087 William decreed that each town should appoint a Town Crier to broadcast his new laws to a largely illiterate populace and not only that but to warn of impending danger and the more mundane happenings of interest.

During the medieval period as trade increased, tradesmen formed guilds and inspectors were appointed to uphold controls such as the price charged for a loaf of bread and it was paramount that the rules were broadcast to the population so the Crier fulfilled the function of an oral newspaper, imparting news of royal events, executions, whippings, taxations, wars, notifications of markets and, much later in Victorian times, obituaries, advertisements and even errant wives. Thus the Town Crier became a familiar figure on the streets with his bell and cry of “Oyez Oyez Oyez,” derived from the Norman French which means “Hear ye” and as a representative of the Crown an assault on a crier was considered an act of treason. By Tudor times because of the risk of fire and its subsequent rapid escalation among the close built wooden houses, night watchmen, or bellman

were appointed to raise the alarm should fire break out. Samuel Pepys writes in his diary in 1660 of staying up until he heard the Bellman's cry of 'all's well' Town Criers were people of standing in the community, usually men but surprisingly there were some women Criers and occasionally a husband and wife performed the role together, she ringing the hand bell and the husband doing the shouting. It was not unusual for the role to be passed from father to son. Of course it goes without saying that Criers should also be literate to enable them to read the proclamations at a place where people gathered, often at the door of an inn. Following the reading, the proclamation would be nailed to the door post, hence the origin of the term 'posting a notice' and incredibly nail holes can still be seen at the Bell Hotel in Thetford.

Although we always think of the Town Crier using a bell it was not mandatory and it is known that a few used a horn or a drum and the custom was not confined to this country and was adopted by many of the colonies. Sadly very few records remain to give us a deeper knowledge of the Town Crier but many cities and towns are reviving the tradition and they are often requested for private functions and to promote their town in national and international competitions. As always, Mike had some very amusing anecdotes to relate and concluded the talk with an energetic and rousing demonstration of his skills.

At this meeting Loreen Knights presented Mike with a genuine old Town Crier's Bell which had been in her family for generations.



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We need to remain as a Group. We must be ready when this is all over to pick up our normal lives and activities.

It's a good opportunity to get up-to-date with your family history. Please make use of our Newsletter to let everyone know how you are getting on with your family history and let us have your queries - maybe one of us knows the answer – or can point you in the way to find out.

Betty
1st December 2020