



Faith Matters



Whaley Bridge Uniting Church
Christmas issue 2025



Arise, shine, the light has come!

Year on year Christmas seems to appear around us earlier and earlier. The shops are soon filled with Santas of all sorts, glittering stars, large baubles and tempting gift ideas and food to encourage us into the festive spirit. Down through the 2000 years since Christ's birth, this celebration has changed. Though we don't know the exact date when Christ was born, we know that in time in a number of countries, 25th December became the preferred date. However, the date is not important. The most important thing to take from this most significant of all births, is that Jesus is God's son and that through his birth we know him as Emmanuel- God with us.

Jesus was longed for and hoped for. The prophets spoke long before about his coming. They had waited, prayed and hoped that there would be one who was coming to save them. Imagine for a moment rewinding the clock back 2000 years and hearing for the first time that Jesus had been born. Capture the sense of joy, hope fulfilled and expectation of what the future will be like.

As we think about Jesus' birth it's important to remember what Jesus did on the cross and how he was raised to life so that we might be saved. This is the Good News that we base our faith on. This is the Good News that countless numbers have believed, put their trust in Jesus and built their lives upon.

The light has come! (Isaiah ch 60 v 1)

I pray that as we journey through Advent and on to Christmas that we might recapture that sense of awe and hope that this time brings. Celebrating the Good News that Jesus is with us. How ever you spend Christmas may you have a time filled with joy and peace.

Christmas Blessings

Georgina<><



Christmas services



The Big Sing—carols for
Christian Aid. Saturday Dec 5th

Christmas carol service Sunday
Dec 21st at 5pm



Christmas Day Family service 10 am

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of
the year,

Give me a light that I might tread safely into
the unknown. And he replied

Go out into the darkness and put your hand into
the hand of God

That shall be to you better than light and safer
than a known way. M. L. Haskins





The history of Christmas



It's Christmas again and what a glorious celebration for billions of Christians all over the world as they celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

The date of Jesus' birth is recorded as being set in the early fourth century, as Dec 25th, this being the date of the winter solstice in the Roman Empire.

Prior to Christian celebrations, Roman pagans celebrated saturnalia, a time when the law courts were closed and the law dictated that citizens could not be punished for a number of crimes. This led to feasting and some dreadful indulgences for many years.

As more people converted to christianity less barbarous traditions were adopted, but some traditions remained ,such as the eating of man shaped biscuits, which became the gingerbread men we know.

With the Saxons came the word 'Yule'and for many centuries a yule



log was burned and a Yule candle was lit to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Santa Claus was not known until the 19th century. St Nicholas

was well loved and popular and years after he was canonised Italian sailors took his remains to Italy where the tradition began of him being the benevolent deity who filled children's stockings with gifts, As time went on the tradition spread throughout Europe and he developed a long white beard.

In the 1820's Dr Clement Moore wrote 'Twas the night before Christmas' and the idea of Santa popping down chimneys, riding on a sleigh with eight reindeer was born. In 1931 Coca Cola decided to dress Santa Claus in red , sporting a jolly face and so Father



Christmas was born.

The Christmas tree was also a pagan tradition.

Druids had long worshipped trees and decorated them in their homes, and this was adapted by Christians to become one of our most loved traditions.

The giving of gifts, is associated by Christians, with the giving of gifts to baby Jesus by the Magi.



In the 1800's gifts were simple, nuts, oranges, lemons, simple home made trinkets, toys, dolls, far different to those gifts under our trees today.

To discover where mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas puddings came from we need to go back to the early Roman Saturnalia, - winter solstice.

The Romans preserved their fruit throughout the winter by making them into heavy cake called Satura. They used honey as a preservative and these sweet recipes came to parts of Europe in Medieval times.

As a result a medieval porridge called frumenty became very popular as it was filled with fruit and nuts, raisins , prunes, mutton and beef. The recipe varied in the 19th century to become 'plum pudding' .



More Christmas traditions later.

Shopping for a Turkey

It was Christmas Eve in a well known supermarket and a woman was anxiously picking over the last few remaining turkeys in the hope of finding a large one. In desperation she called over a shop assistant and said

"Excuse me. Do these turkeys get any bigger?"

" No" he replied " They're all dead"!



TAKE CARE

The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 14,700 people visit A and E each November and December from Christmas related accidents. The majority are from falling, lacerations and back strains. Strangely not electrical related incidents— or perhaps they did not live to tell the tale, so beware!!

'Twas The Night Before Christmas

Poem Lyrics

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house.
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;



The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,



When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.



The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,



With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"



As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.



And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes — how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

In our thoughts and prayers this Christmas time
friends we have lost in recent months.

In particular we pray for
the families of

Min Peckham

Agnes Jodrell

Jeanne Bowker

Dorothy Hulme

Anne Reeves

Stuart Scoffins



This month to
Angela Timothy 14th
John Sidebotham 29th



PINE CONE TREE DECORATION



1. Paint the outside tips of 2 pinecones using silver paint. Leave to dry.
2. Stick the two bottom ends of the pinecones together using super tacky multi-purpose glue. Hold in place for 1 minute and leave to dry.
3. Take one pine branch and trim the edges down using scissors. Trim the bottom of the pine branch the most so that it can fit easily around the two pinecones.
4. Bend the pine branch stem into a curve that fits around the two pinecones.
5. Take 3 red berries and wrap them around each other to tie them together. Place a row of glue dots around the stem of the berries and stick them in between the two silver pinecones.
6. Place a row of glue dots along the stem of the pine branch. Slot the pine branch in between the two silver pinecones and hold in place for 1-2 minutes.
7. Cut a piece of ribbon around 15cm long and thread through a gap in the pine branch stem and tie into a loop for hanging secured with a double knot.



Many years ago Agnes taught the choir to sing Silent Night in her native Austrian language. In her memory and for those of us who found it particularly moving here is the first verse again

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht
Alles schlaft ein sam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar.
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh.
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh.



The words are slightly different to those we sing today but this was the carol sung together by British, French and German troops on Christmas Day, 1914

We send our prayers this Christmas time to

Joyce Clayton

Jean Mellor

Bill Jackson

and to all those we know who need our thoughts, prayers and a little kindness at this time of year, which may be difficult for them.



A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS

Heavenly Father, as twinkling lights adorn homes, and joy fills hearts, may we remember the true light that dawned at Christmas.

Let us embrace your love, warmth and guidance, shining it forth to all we meet, and reminding the world of the hope birthed on that holy night.

Winnie Smith - Garland

Last issues - hidden books of the Bible-answers This is a **most remarkable** puzzle. It was found by a gentleman in the seat pocket of an aeroplane, on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, **keeping** him occupied for hours. He enjoyed it so much he passed it on to some of his friends. One friend called **John** worked on it while fishing from his boat. Another studied it while playing his **banjo**. Elaine Taylor, a journalist friend, was so intrigued by it she mentioned it in her weekly newspaper column. Another friend **judges** the **job** of solving this puzzle so involving, **she brews** a cup of tea to help her nerves. **There** will be some names that are really easy to spot. That's a **fact**. Some people, however, will soon find themselves in a **jam**, especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalised. **Truthfully**, **from answers** we get, we are forced to admit it **usually** takes a minister or a scholar to see some of **them at the worst**. Research has shown that something in our **genes is** responsible for the difficulty we have in seeing the books in this paragraph. During a recent fund-raising event, which featured this puzzle, the Alpha Delta **Phi lemonade** booth set a new record. The local paper, the **Chronicle**, **surveyed** over 200 patrons who reported that this puzzle was one of the most difficult they had ever seen. As **Daniel Humana** **humbly** puts it, "The books are all right here in plain view hidden from sight." **Those able** to find all of them will hear great **lamentations** from those who have to be shown. One **revelation** that may help is that books like **Timothy** and **Samuel** may occur without their **numbers**. Also, keep in mind, that punctuation and spaces in the middle are **normal**. A **chipper** attitude will help you **compete** really well against those who claim to know the answers. Remember, there is no need for a mad **exodus**; there really are 30 books of the Bible **lurking** somewhere in this paragraph waiting to be found. God bless.



THINK FAST.

A Christmas game for all

You have 3 minutes to think of 3 answers for each category. The person with the most answers filled in, wins!

American states	.....	.....	.....
White flowers	.....	.....	.....
Pizza toppings	.....	.....	.....
Body parts	.....	.....	.....
Red items	.....	.....	.....
Types of cakes	.....	.....	.....
Prime Ministers	.....	.....	.....
Desserts	.....	.....	.....
TV programmes	.....	.....	.....
Holiday places	.....	.....	.....
Christmas carols	.....	.....	.....
Christmas foods	.....	.....	.....

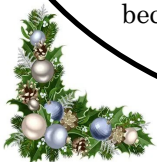


Luke 2 v 1 to 7

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David). To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The poinsettia story

Legend has it that a poor little Mexican girl called Pepita had no present to give to baby Jesus. Her cousin tried to cheer her saying that the baby would love even the smallest gift. And so she picked a handful of weeds. As she laid them at the nativity scene in her church the weeds burst into bright red flowers. A miracle, and from then on the flowers became known as the Flowers of the Holy Night.



In the New Year why not try something new?

After all Socrates learned to dance when he was 70. So if its good enough for SocratesWe could arrange old time dancing lessons at church or perhaps you could try bungee jumping from Blackpool tower or swimming with sharks if that is on your bucket list.Perhaps travelling or just having time to sit and reflect.

Whatever, just do it. Life is too short to wonder what if.....





Over the Road news

Once again Santa will be sitting in the window of Over the Road on the first Saturday in December. Last year we snapped him as he surprised all the children as they passed by. They thought he was a model until he waved to them. It was a real talking point and word soon went round the village and people came especially to see Father Christmas and wave to him. Thank you customer Mike.

The Christmas pop up shop at Church was incredibly busy and raised a huge £2,387 for the charities we support.

Once again we have had a very successful year and were able to financially support local charities and the work of WBUC in the community. Sadly shop founder Anne Reeves died in October.

See below



Jonathan's tribute to his Mum.

'Born in 1935 her early life involved living on the gas works run by her father George and swimming in the gas holder tanks. All of the house lights were gas and I remember her saying that she was able to switch the upstairs lights on from downstairs.

From being a Hulme Grammar school head girl to getting married and raising 2 children and helping with homework late at night and early in the morning, walking labradors and finally being a secretary to my father. My father bought an Alvis and on one trip they ran out of petrol in Scotland. Not wanting to leave my mother in the middle of nowhere on her own, she had to go and get the petrol. Upon her eventual return, my father, who had been reading the manual, happily informed her that "this control operates a reserve tank"!

She worked as a maths teacher and being the daughter of a seamstress was skilled in clothing alterations. The family moved from Chadderton to Disley and then to Whaley Bridge where she was a driving force to start the church shop and hosted annual garden parties for all those involved. She was a hard working person, always doing different jobs in the house. For one or two days a week she looked after her Grandchildren Hannah and David and we will remember her smiles and miss the cakes she made for Christmas, Easter and birthdays. '

Margaret Smith later spoke about Anne's huge contribution to the life of the Uniting Church.



Chris' upcycled Christmas cards are now on sale in the shop. All proceeds for the work of our church.

Back in 1843 Sir Henry Cole was tired of writing letters to friends and family at Christmas time and wished for an alternative.

He commissioned the first card with a family scene, and this became very popular with the upper classes.

Thankfully cards are cheaper and accessible to all these days.



FINISH THAT SONG. 20 Christmas songs, you just need to sing the next line

Sleigh bells ring, are you listening, In the lane snow is glistening

There'll be parties for hosting, marshmallows for toasting

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your toes.....

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know.....

Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way

So this is Christmas and what have you done

I saw Mummy kissing Santa Claus

Deck the halls with boughs of holly



What's on elsewhere in the village this Christmas

Nov 29th Christmas lights switch on, with carols.

Lantern parade from Stanways to the canal basin.

Santa's grotto in the Mechanics from 3pm.

Carol singing and Christmas story with WB band in the Transhipment shed.

Dec 5-7th Christmas tree festival and market. Holy Trinity church.

Dec 13th Santa arrives by boat.

And the best Christmas jokes are those one liners that children love to tell

How did the reindeer learn to play the piano?
He was elf-taught.

What did Adam say on the day before Christmas?
It's Christmas Eve.

How did Mary and Joseph weigh baby Jesus?
They had a weigh in the manger.

What did the bald man say when he got a comb for Christmas?
I'll never part with it.

What do you call an old snowman?

Water



If you would like to put a piece into Faith Matters please contact editor Chris at

c.mellor174@icloud.com

Please note items should arrive no later than 6 weeks prior to publishing

Last year was the year that Santa got stuck,
 The chimney was filled with his rear,
 So Mum came and pushed, till he popped—quite
 flushed,
 And mumblings words of good cheer ?

As quiet as a mouse, this sixteen stone man
 Hauled his sack, on his back ,up the stairs,
 And groped round the room, in its darkness and gloom,
 Why will Mum keep shifting the chairs?

The presents are here, and Santa has gone,
 On his sleigh, that he'd parked on the shed,
 But at twenty past four, comes a knock at the door,
 And the children fly onto your bed!

What could be nicer than a child filled with joy,
 Santa's been in the night, and guess what?
 He's brought Jamie a train, and a JCB crane,
 And Susie a doll and a cot.

While Mum cooks the dinner, Dad plays with the kids,
 Is that train really Jamie's or Dads'?
 Poor man he got braces, a comb and shoe laces,
 But stills thinks 'he's one of the lads'!

And all through the day Jamie's blown his new whistle,
 Till Mum hopes he'll soon lose the pea!
 She distracts him with chocs, and dates from a box,
 And at last comes the time for his tea!

And later that night, when the kids go to bed,
 They pray to sweet Jesus above
 That He'll care for those children who never get toys,
 And without any parents to love.

Mum tucks them in bed and gives each a kiss,
 Little angles-both out like a light,
 Her pride—a reflection of sweet Mary's love
 For **her** son—on that Bethlehem night. C.M.



The missing £5 note

George worked for the Post Office and his job was to process all the mail that had illegible addresses. One day just before Christmas a letter landed on his desk simply addressed in shaky handwriting 'To God'. With no other clue on the envelope George opened the letter and read.

'Dear God

I am a 93 year old widow living on a state pension. Yesterday someone stole my purse. It had £100 in it, which was all the money I had in the world and no pension due until after Christmas. Next week is Christmas and I had invited 2 friends over for Christmas lunch. Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with. I have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. God can you please help me?

George was really touched and being kind hearted he put a copy of the letter on the staff notice-board.

The letter touched the other postmen and they all dug into their pockets for a whip round. Between them they raise £95. Using a franked PO envelope they sent the cash on to the old lady and for the rest of the day the workers all felt a warm glow at the nice thing they had done.

Christmas came and went. A few days later another letter, simply addressed to 'God' landed in the sorting office. The postmen gathered round as George opened the letter. It read

'Dear God, how can I ever thank you for what you did for me? Because of your generosity I was able to provide a lovely lunch for my friends. We had a very nice day and even Father John, our local Priest was overjoyed. By the way there was £5 missing.

I think it must have been one of them down at the Post Office !!!

Although this is a funny story it has a real moral to it. We should never take for granted the unexpected gifts that come into our lives. If we do not appreciate that gift, if we wish we had more—and more importantly ignore the love and caring with which it is given, then the message of God this Christmastime is lost.



Mince pies evolved from Tudor mutton and spice pies. Originally made from 13 ingredients to represent Jesus and the 12 disciples, mutton for the shepherds, spices for the wise men. Their rectangular shape for was baby Jesus in the manger. Tradition has it that you should always make a wish with the first mince pie of the season.



200g SR Flour
100g cold butter cut into pieces
85g light muscovado sugar
85g marzipan cut into cubes
2 eggs
300g mincemeat
2 tbsp flaked almonds

Sheila's Mincemeat and marzipan teabread

Heat oven to Gas4/180/Fan 160
Butter a 1kg loaf tin and line base
Tip flour into bowl, add cold butter and rub in to make fine breadcrumbs
Stir in sugar and marzipan cubes
Whisk eggs and stir into mincemeat. Stir into flour mixture
Spoon into tin and level top
Sprinkle flaked almonds on top
Bake for approx. 1 hour
Cool in tin for 10 minutes then move to wire rack
Dust with icing sugar (optional)



A couple had two little boys, ages 8 and 10, who were excessively mischievous. The two were always getting into trouble and their parents could be assured that if any mischief occurred in their town their two young sons were in some way involved.

The parents were at their wits end as to what to do about their sons' behavior. The mother had heard that a clergyman in town had been successful in disciplining children in the past, so she asked her husband if he thought they should send the boys to speak with the clergyman.

The husband said, 'We might as well. We need to do something before I really lose my temper!' The clergyman agreed to speak with the boys, but asked to see them individually. The 8 year old went to meet with him first. The clergyman sat the boy down and asked him sternly, 'Where is God?'

The boy made no response, so the clergyman repeated the question in an even sterner tone, 'Where is God?' Again the boy made no attempt to answer. So the clergyman raised his voice even more and shook his finger in the boy's face, 'WHERE IS GOD?'

At that the boy bolted from the room and ran directly home, slamming himself in the closet. His older brother followed him into the closet and asked what had happened. The younger brother replied, 'We are in BIG trouble this time. God is missing and they think we did it.'

Please don't forget to recycle your wrapping paper and Christmas tree. In the New Year please save your Christmas cards for Chris so that they can be upcycled for next Christmas. Thank you



.And if you should receive a new phone this Christmas and it is a mystery to fathom out how it works, - how to set it up and read all the instructions - then don't despair. Just remember this

Adam and Eve were the first people not to read the Apple Terms and Conditions either!



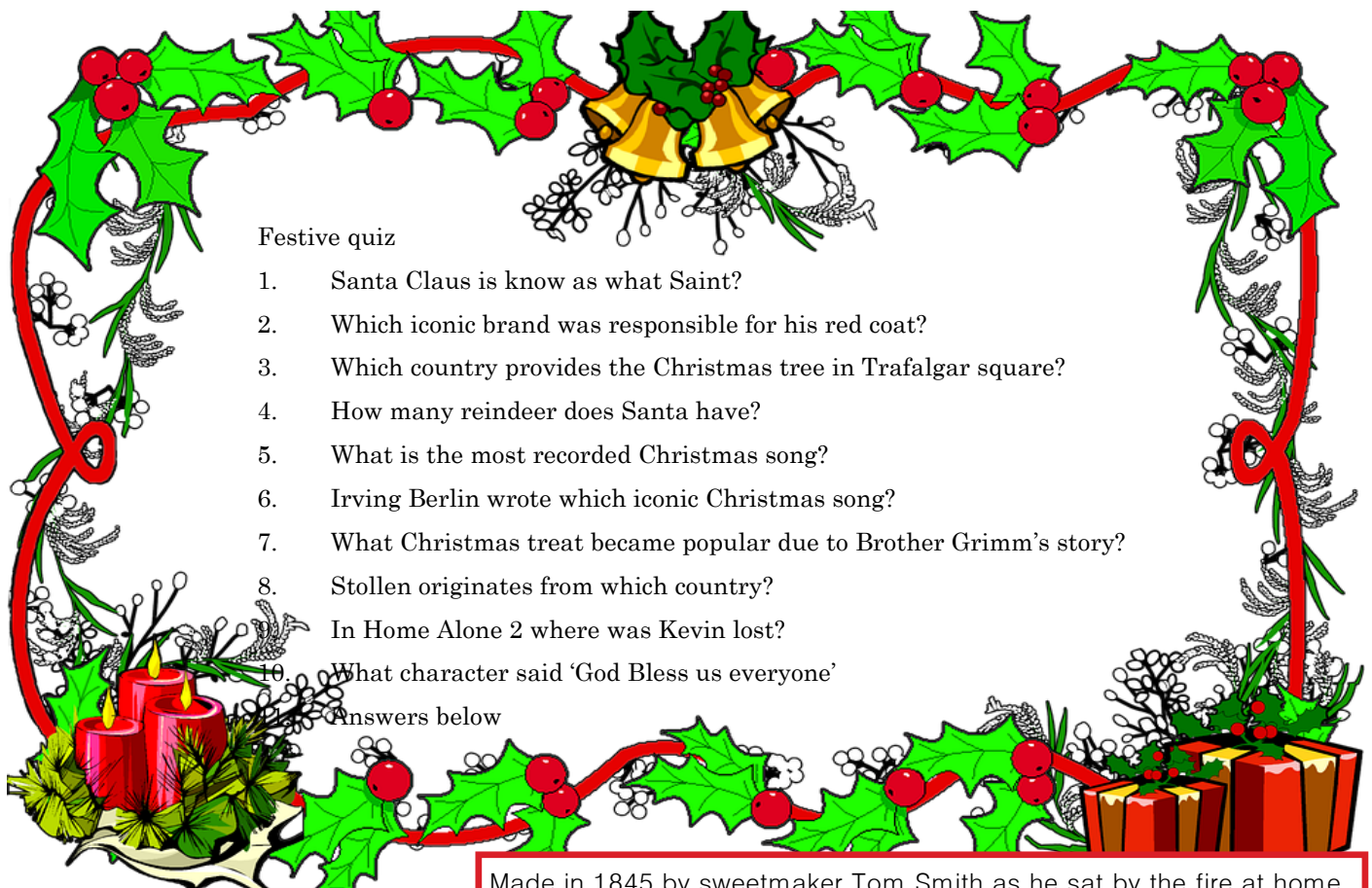
This issues book memory comes from Brenda Page who volunteers in the shop.

As a child one of my favourite books of all time was The Night before Christmas.

Every Christmas Eve my Mum would read it to me just before we put out mince pies and sherry for Father Christmas and a carrot for Rudolph. The book was shaped like Father Christmas with a velvet Santa hat and lovely pictures. He was a really cheery Santa and I love it.

I still have the book, have read it to all my little ones over the years, and it will be out again this year.

I now also have an animated version where a bear is telling the story to a mouse which is sitting on his shoulder and interjects with parts of the story. Very animated and has been borrowed by most of the family! It came from the Christmas shop in Broadway (sadly now closed). I gave it to my Mum in her later years. But The Night before Christmas probably led to my enjoyment and excitement of Christmas today. We still have Christmas stockings filled with presents like I have done all my life.



- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1.St. Nicholas | 6 White Christmas |
| 2.Coca Cola | 7 Gingerbread house |
| 3 Norway | 8 Germany |
| 4 9 | 9 New York |
| 5 Silent night | 10 Tiny Tim |

Made in 1845 by sweetmaker Tom Smith as he sat by the fire at home and was inspired by the popping noises. Crowns and gifts were added much later by his sons. The worlds longest cracker was 207ft. long x 13ft. The biggest pull took 1,478 men and the most expensive have gifts of gold and silver inside.





The Reckoning

T'was the month after Christmas and all through the house

Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.

The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste

All the holiday parties had gone to my waist.

When I got on the scales there arose such a number!

When I walked to the store (less a walk than a lumber)

I'd remember the marvellous meals I'd prepared,

The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared,

The wine and the rum balls, the bread and the cheese ,

And the way I'd never said "No thank you", but "please".

As I dressed myself in my husband's old shirt

And prepared once again to do battle with dirt -

I said to myself, as only I can,

"You can't spend a winter disguised as a man!"

So—away with the last of the sour cream dip,

Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and dip.

Every last bit of food that I like must be banished

'Til all the additional ounces have vanished.

I won't have a biscuit— not even a lick.

I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.

I won't have cream cakes, or chocolate, or pie;

I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.

"I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore"—

But isn't that what January's for?

Unable to giggle, no longer a riot,

Happy New Year to all, and to all a good diet!



Mistletoe has long been associated with love and romance but in fact can be traced back to pagan practice. It was revered by the druids as a sacred plant to ward off evil spirits and bring fertility. Surprisingly the Victorians popularised kissing underneath the mistletoe.



Don't forget to make your New Years

resolution for 2026 to try something new - and hold this thought

Remember that amateurs built the ark

Professionals built the Titanic!!!!

You can do anything— go for it!

And my last story of the Year has to be this one

At a Tuesday coffee morning a group of Senior Citizens were sitting round talking about their aches and pains.

"My arms are so weak I can hardly lift this cup of coffee" said one.

"I know what you mean," said another "My cataracts are so bad I can't even see my coffee".

"I can't chew my biscuit as my false teeth are rubbing" said a third.

"My blood pressure pills make me need the loo," said another.

"I guess that's the price we pay for growing old" said another.

There was a short moment of silence then a woman said cheerfully

"Thank God we can still drive"!!!!!!



I hope you have enjoyed this Christmas edition. It has been a joy to prepare.

May the love that came down at Christmas fill you with peace and happiness.

Chris