



a Victorian Christmas

Traditional decorations

Fire and Light were deeply ingrained traditions dating from pagan times when the winter solstice marked the turn of the year. The Romans celebrated this time with Saturnalia and Kalends. The Northern Europeans with the festival of Yule. All used evergreens and light to symbolise the promise of new growth and fertility.

The Christian church wove these traditions into their own celebrations of Christ's birth with the Holly for example, coming to represent the crown of thorns and its berries drops of Christ's blood.

The Victorians continued these traditions into their celebrations for Christmas, decorating their homes with lighted candles and evergreen wreaths and garlands, the pagan origins forgotten. Even the Mistletoe, banned from churches because of its pagan connections survived in the Victorian home as a symbol of everlasting love.



The Christmas tree

Christmas trees were introduced from Germany into England by Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert. The custom of decorating a tree with things to eat such as shaped biscuits, fruit and sweets was popular in his native Germany. A Christmas card showing the Royal Family around the decorated tree publicized it and soon every Village square had one. Baubles were introduced when a glass blower discovered that he could make light balls of glass which could be suspended on the tree. Candles were lit and attached to the tree but the many fires that these caused devastated many of the celebrations. Finally in 1895 a telephone worker called Ralph Morris had the idea of using the tiny bulbs that lit up his switchboard as tree decorations and the lighted candle was replaced with a safer symbol of light.

