

Writing on the Wowld

(S T O W E O N T H E W O W L D ' S N E W S L E T T E R)



The Key to It All (The Seneschal's Report)



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Unto the Canton of Stowe on the Wowld does Lord Alfgeirr Agnarsson send greetings.

As this the December edition of writing on the wowld is released I must first apologise for its delay due to an error on my behalf. Durant has been doing an excellent job on these newsletters and I thank him for all his hard work.

As the New Year begins we start a new chapter. After many years at the Pendle Hill Scout Hall we have moved a short distance to Toongabbie. This new hall has much better facilities, is in much better condition and is cheaper than our old location. Our Wednesday night gatherings are now held at: 1st Toongabbie scout hall, 99 Bungaree rd, Toongabbie. Our website and flyers will be updated shortly.

At our February meeting I will have been seneschal of Stowe for 6 months. At that meeting I will be advertising for a Deputy Seneschal to assist me with the organisation and

growth of our canton. This deputy is not intended to be my successor; I have every intention of carrying out my 2 year term and will advertise for my replacement when I have served for 18 months. Deputy seneschal is an excellent opportunity to be more involved in the direction of our group, perhaps take charge of a few



Alfgeirr Agnarsson

projects and gain experience without having to deal with the paperwork. If you are interested please talk to me at our next meeting. Our monthly A&S days will continue although the community centre is booked out and unless we can find a suitable replacement the February A&S will be held at my house (stay tuned to the mailing lists).

On the 9th of February we will be holding a potluck picnic and tournament in Nurraging Reserve Blacktown, there will be more details on the list and FB page. This should be a fun day and a first event for some of our newer members, I hope to see you all there.

Yours in service

Lord Alfgeirr Agnarsson

Seneschal of Stowe
on the Wowld



People of Stowe



Merlin's Crystal Ball

(Knowing the Future and the Past)



Medieval Christmas

Around Christmas time many people observe set traditions and also have some of their own, however, what was a Medieval Christmas like? When you think about a Medieval Christmas what do you imagine it would be like? Do you picture royal banquet halls decked in holly with the minstrels belting out Christmas Carols while everyone else fills themselves full with food and drink? What was the reality?

The roots of the Christmas festival go back to late antiquity but it wasn't until 1038 that the word Christmas was first recorded in a book from Saxon England and it wasn't until the fourth century that Pope Julius I came up with the date of 25 December for Christmas. It was very likely that this date was chosen in an attempt to 'Christianize' a pagan holiday that fell on the same date.

The 25 December was not the most important day of Christmas in medieval times. Epiphany (6 January or the twelfth night) was the most important because it celebrated Christ's baptism or marked the visit of the three Magi bearing gifts for the baby Jesus. Some of the people may have forgotten when Christ was born but not the day when they got gifts.

In medieval times Christmas was not a time of revelry and fun. Christmas was a time for a special mass, quiet prayer and reflection. Christmas Day was also a "quarter day" which meant that the poor had to pay their rent on this day!



The medieval Christmas holiday was a combination of Christian and pagan celebrations. One of the pagan traditions that became a part of Christmas was the burning of the 'Yule' log. This custom came from many different cultures but in all of them the significance seemed to lie in 'jul' or 'wheel' of the year. For the pagan festival of Yule the druids blessed and burned a log which they kept burning for twelve days as part of the winter solstice. Part of the log was kept for the following year when it would be used to light the new Yule log. For the Vikings the Yule log was part of their celebration of the solstice known as the 'julfest'. The Vikings would carve runes on the

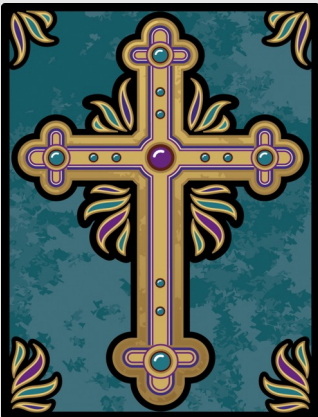
log that represented unwanted traits that they wanted taken from them; for example, ill fortune or poor honour. At the same time the church celebrated Candlemas which was the feast for the purification of the Virgin and was held on the 2 February. The Medieval parishioners went to church with a penny and a candle to be blessed. The Yule log gave the pagans a symbolic light to guide them through the winter while the Candlemas candle gave the Christians hope through times of cold and hunger. When both of these traditions were joined the ordinary people could celebrate the birth of Christ and their own salvation while enjoying themselves with the feasting and fun of the pagan tradition.



The Christmas crib originated in medieval Italy. It is said that in 1223 that Saint Francis of Assisi used the crib to explain the Christmas story to the people of Assisi. The animals in the Christmas story also come from the 13th century although they are not mentioned in the bible.

In medieval times the 28 December was known as 'Holy Innocents Day' or 'Childermass Day'. The children would not have enjoyed this day because they were cruelly beaten. They were beaten to remind them that this is the day when King Herod ordered that all children under two years of age be killed in an attempt to get rid of Jesus. In some European towns it was the custom for one boy to be given the charge of the town for the day after being made bishop. Many people thought this day was bad luck. For example; Edward IV refused to be crowned on that day.

Christmas was the longest holiday of the year. Poorer people were let off work for the celebration and were sometimes treated to Christmas dinner. Some manors gave out Christmas treats depending on a person's social status. The poor would get leftovers and a loaf of bread. A large landholder may get a Christmas dinner that included beer, beef, bacon, chicken stew, cheese and candles to light the feast. If you were part of a royal household you may be treated to a fabulous feast that included being given gifts of jewels and robes.



In 1482 King Edward IV gave a Christmas gift to his people in the form of a banquet that fed over two thousand people each day. Edward's brother, Richard III, had to sell items from the Royal household and give pledges to live up to his brother's reputation. With the money he made, Richard presented the city of London with a magnificent gold cup that was encrusted with jewels. Richard and his wife Anne spent a stupendous 1200 pounds on new clothes and gifts for the court. Richard licensed a merchant to bring the jewels into England so that he could have first choice. This was so that he could give Anne immaculate gifts.

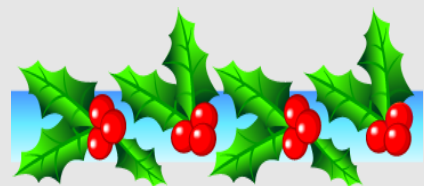
On Boxing Day, rich lords often gave their tenants a gift containing a moral lesson. On the same day the poor received money from their masters in hollow clay pots with a slit in the top. You had to break these pots to get the money out. Those offerings were nicknamed 'piggies' and the clay pots 'piggy banks'.

The ever present threat of hunger meant that the Christmas feast was enthusiastically celebrated. At a noble's Christmas banquet you may have had your fill of starters and tasty treats. They often had a boar's head for their main dish. The boar's head was often served with rosemary and an apple or orange in its mouth. In the country they would use a wild boar if they could get one. If they couldn't they would use

goose or venison or a swan (to kill a swan permission needed to be granted by the King). The swan would often be lavishly coated in butter and saffron. People down the social ladder would have to make do with what was left of the deer as they weren't allowed the best parts. The leftovers were known as 'umbles'. These were usually the heart, liver, ears, feet, tongue and brains. These were made into a pie; therefore, the poor would eat 'umble pie'. Today, if you have taken a 'tumble' in life and are not able to live to your usual standard it is said that you have to eat 'humble pie'. The goose was the most popular meat at medieval tables because it was inexpensive and quick to fatten.

In medieval England a large mince pie was always baked, however, they were filled with all sorts of shredded meat along with spices and fruit. The recipe changed in Victorian times when the shredded meat was left out. It was said that if you made a wish with your first bite that it would come true. If you refused a pie when someone offered it you might suffer bad luck.

Another of the treats was a Christmas pudding that was called 'frumenty'. The medieval Christmas pudding was made of wheat, porridge, dried fruit and currents.



Sometimes eggs, spices, cinnamon and nutmeg would be added.

Drink was not forgotten at these medieval Christmas celebrations. One drink known as lambswool was served hot and was made up of mulled beer with apples on the surface. Another drink was known as Church Ale and was reserved only for Christmas. It was sold either in the churchyard or the church itself. This ale was a strong brew. Wassail was another strong drink that was usually made of ale, honey and spices. This drink would be put in a large bowl and served hot. The name Wassail comes from Old English words 'waes hael' which means; 'be well', 'be hale' or 'good health'. The host, when serving the drink, would lift the bowl and greet his friends with 'waes hael' to which they would normally reply 'drinc hael' which meant 'drink and be well'.

In medieval times Carols (which meant to sing and dance in a circle) were banned by many Churches in Europe because they were considered lewd. This was because the Carols were often accompanied by dancing that was suggestive of fertility traditions of pagan songs and dance styles. The tradition of carol singers going from house to house is a result of the same Church ban. The song 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' came from a medieval game that was set to music.

In this game one person would sing a stanza and then another would add their own lines after repeating the first person's verse. It is said that this type of song helped Catholics in post restoration England to remember facts about their faith at a time when practising it could get them killed.



Another popular form of Christmas entertainment was 'mumming'. Mumming were unceremonious plays without words that were performed in villages or castles. The actors would dress up as members of the opposite sex to perform the comic tales. The troupe of actors also danced, dined and performed mystery plays. These mystery plays told the story of Christ.

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas, even in medieval times, without decorations. In twelfth century London it was said that every man's house and church was decked with holly, ivy, bay and anything else that was green. The greenery brightened up the dull winter. It was a Christian belief of the time that holly had white berries originally that turned to red when the Christ was made to wear the crown of thorns. Holly was also important to the Druids. Mistletoe was used by the Druids, as we use it today, to forge

romantic encounters. Ivy was associated with Bacchus the Roman god of wine and carousing. Of course this was banned by the Church because of its link with immorality. It was only later in the Middle Ages that the Church allowed Ivy because a superstition arose that it could help recognise witches and protect against the plague.

Oak trees were sacred to the Druids and the Romans believed that evergreen trees had special powers. The Viking's hung fir and ash trees with their war trophies for good luck. Even before Medieval times the Egyptians treasured and worshipped evergreens. The Egyptians brought green date palms leaves into their homes. Both Christians and Pagans treated the fir tree as special because the fir tree keeps its green needles throughout the winter. The fir tree became a symbol of life and renewal. The fir tree also represented hope even if you were looking forward to the first signs of spring. There has been a long association for Christianity with the fir tree. The association began in Germany about one thousand year ago when Saint Boniface, who converted a large number of people to Christianity, was said to have come across a group of pagans worshipping an oak tree. It was said, that in anger, Saint Boniface cut down the oak tree and that a young fir tree sprung up from its roots. It was taken to be a sign of Christ's triumph. To Christians the fir tree came to symbolise eternal life.

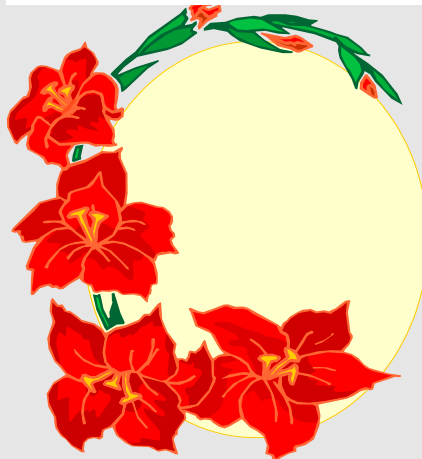
Today the Christmas tree (fir tree) is one of the symbols of Christmas. In the middle ages, on Christmas Eve called 'Adam and Eve Day', the Christian Churches would decorate outside trees with apples. Roman Catholic Church history says that Martin Luther began the tradition of decorating trees to celebrate Christmas. About 1500 on one cold crisp Christmas Eve he was walking through snow-covered woods when he was struck by the beauty of a small group of evergreens.



The evergreens were dusted in snow and shimmered in the moonlight. Martin cut one of them down and when he got home set it up inside his home so he could share the story with his children. He decorated the fir tree with candles which he lit in honour of Christ's birth. In Germany, during the sixteenth century, a fir tree would be decorated with paper flowers and carried through the town to the town square on Christmas Eve. The people of the town would have a great feast, celebrate including dancing around the tree and then burn it.



Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan government tried to ban Christmas festivities and some of the traditions that were developed in medieval times. This, however, wasn't successful for long.



Many of our current Christmas traditions came from the mixing of early Christian and Pagan customs. While the Church secured Christmas as a truly religious Christian holiday the peasants quietly continued their old ways. Medieval people also used to get excited about Christmas. William the Conqueror was crowned as King of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas day in 1066. This was such a momentous occasion that all the cheering by noblemen inside the Abbey made the guards on the outside think that William was being attacked. The guards ran to assist William. The Coronation ended in a riot with people killed and houses burned.

**This was
Medieval
Christmas.**





STOWE CONTACT DETAILS

The Canton of Stowe-on-the-Wowld is an SCA group in the Barony of Rowany, Kingdom of Lochac (geographically Western Sydney NSW Australia). The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) is a worldwide organisation dedicated to the study and recreation of pre-17th Century Europe with activities such as combat, feasting, minstrelsy, costuming, embroidery and much more.

We meet every Wednesday at 7pm at the Pendle Hill Scout Hall (near Civic Park, off Civic Ave) in Pendle Hill where we have fighter practice, many arts and sciences projects (not to mention much socialising) happening.

Meeting: 7:30 pm Wednesday Nights
Toongabbie Scout Hall
Bungaree Rd,
Toongabbie

Email: stowe.seneschal@gmail.com

To keep in touch with happenings in and around Stowe, or to ask any questions, please feel free to join our emailing list, Stowegians. This list is moderated, the List Caretaker will ask you to verify who you are.

For more information about the Canton of Stowe on the Wowld, contact the Seneschal.

Email: stowe.seneschal@gmail.com



As previously stated the Canton of Stowe on the Wowld is part of the Barony of Rowany.

The Baron of Rowany is Baron Loyola Juan Sanchez Mendoza and the Baroness is Baroness Annora Martin.

The Barony can be contacted via the website in the contacts section: rowany.lochac.sca.org



THE QUILL (from the Chronicler)



I would like to invite members of the SCA from Stowe on the Wowld to submit articles for consideration in our new Newsletter—Writing on the Wowld.

Articles can be historical, about creating or making things, advertising events and so on that would interest the readers.

Please email Durant Blanc d'Airelle at the following email address: greenandwhite2009@hotmail.com and put SCA News Letter Article in the Subject line of the email.