Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Christmas

Tees Valley Museums

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Tees Valley Museums

Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

It's Christmas! In this edition we are looking into the histories of some of the most recognisable parts of Christmas – the crackers, carols and Christmas tree decorations, and we've included a fun recipe so you can make your own frosted fruits!

What are your favourite Christmas traditions? Do you enjoy singing carols with others, or decorating the Christmas tree with friends?

Christmas Trees

Before Victorian times Christmas trees did not exist, although it was believed that trees that remained green all year round – known as evergreens – kept away evil spirits during the winter months, so people would hang branches from fir and pine trees over their doors.

It was Prince Albert in 1841 who started the trend of Christmas trees when he brought spruce trees from Germany to decorate at Windsor Castle. An illustration in a newspaper of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their children decorating the tree was made public, and this sparked the popular tradition which is still going to this day.

Baubles

The first glass Christmas baubles were made in Germany in 1847 by Hans Greiner. His ancestors first opened glass workshops in 1597 in Lauscha in Germany and they made drinking glasses, flasks, bowls, and glass beads.

Lauscha was a town in a river valley and was one of the best places in Germany to make glass, as there was always a good supply of sand to make glass with and plenty of timber to fire the glass ovens.

Hans Greiner used a technique where he blew molten glass into a sphere-shaped mould. Once the glass had cooled and hardened into a bauble it was hand-painted and fixed with a hook.

Greiner's glass baubles were exported throughout the world and were even bought by royalty. In the 1840s a picture of Queen Victoria's Christmas tree decorated with glass baubles appeared in British magazines, and as a result glass Christmas baubles became popular throughout the country.

Nowadays Christmas tree decorations come in all shapes and sizes, like stars, icicles, and birds.

What kinds of decorations do you like to have on your tree?

Christmas Crackers

Christmas Crackers were first invented in 1847 by Tom Smith, a sweet-maker working in London. Smith had been inspired by a trip to Paris to sell sweets wrapped in paper with small riddles inside. However these sweets did not sell very well. Something was missing.

Tom came up with the idea of opening his sweets with a ‘crack’ after he watched sparks fly from his log fire at home. He sourced his ‘crackers’ from a fireworks company and introduced his new Christmas Crackers in 1861.

These new crackers were named -

They were more popular than his 1847 variety and the business grew very quickly.

Tom Smith’s sons took over the business after he died. They had the idea of putting crepe paper crowns and trinkets and jokes into the crackers.

Here are some jokes for you to enjoy.

What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck?
A Christmas Quacker!

How do snowmen get around?
By riding an ‘icicle

What is good King Wenceslas’ favourite pizza?
One that’s deep-pan, crisp and even

Why is the turkey never hungry at Christmas?
It's stuffed

What’s a dog’s favourite carol?
Bark, the herald angels sing

Why are Christmas trees very bad at knitting?
Because they always drop their needles

Christmas Carols and Songs

Christmas carols have been sung as far back as the 14th century to keep up people's spirits during the winter months.

Most well-known carols, like 'O come all ye faithful' and 'Hark, the herald angels sing', have their roots in Christianity, and it is still common for carols to be sung as part of services in church.

But carol singing was also a social pastime when groups of carollers would gather in public spaces and perform for passers-by.

In the 1930s improved technology including radios and gramophones allowed people to listen to music outside of going to live performances, and songs at this time became more detached from religion. 'Santa Clause is comin' to town' and 'Winter Wonderland' were two of the first Christmas songs to be released in this decade.

Why not sing along to Frosty the Snowman?

Frosty the Snowman
Was a jolly happy soul
With a corn cob pipe and a button nose
And two eyes made out of coal

Frosty the Snowman
Is a fairy-tale they say
He was made of snow, but the children know
How he came to life one day

There must have been some magic
In that old top hat they found
For when they placed it on his head
He began to dance around

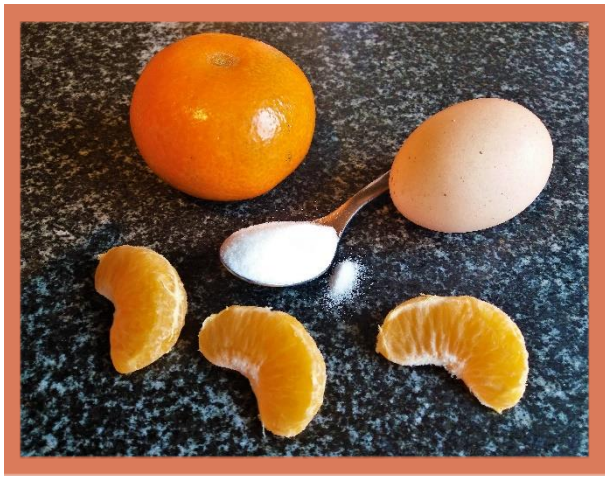
Oh, Frosty the Snowman
Was alive as he could be
And the children say he could laugh and play
Just the same as you and me

How to make Frosted Fruits

Try this simple recipe for Frosted Fruits. They are great for decoration on a Christmas cake.

Ingredients:
Tangerine segments
Caster sugar
1 egg

You can also use other soft fruit, such as strawberries or grapes



Equipment:
A mixing bowl
A separate bowl for separating the egg
A whisk
Two plates

1. Remove the white pith from the tangerine segments.

2. Separate the egg white into the mixing bowl. Store the yolk in a separate bowl.

3. Beat the egg white with a whisk until bubbly.

4. Sprinkle a layer of caster sugar onto a plate.

5. Dip each piece of fruit into the egg white then into the sugar.

6. Place the fruit onto the other plate, then place into the fridge to set.

Frosted fruits are best eaten on the day you make them.

All images used in this pack are courtesy of Dorman Museum, Head of Steam – Darlington Railway Museum, and Preston Park Museum and Grounds.

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under ‘Latest News’ or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk