



Having spent our first Christmas as a married couple in the city of Koln (Cologne) in Germany I was interested in remarks made by the German President during the banquet in Windsor Castle this month.

Commenting on the Christmas tree as one of the best loved traditions in this country which had originated from Germany, he said that the first one had been displayed in Windsor by Queen Charlotte in 1800.

Elements of our traditional Christmas emanating from Germany are mostly associated with the influence of Queen Victoria's German husband Prince Albert, in providing the Christmas atmosphere of "Gemutlichkeit" a kind of cosiness which encompasses a broader sense of warmth, friendliness and contentment which can also be found in a German beer garden or a traditional English pub.

The customs of decorating trees with candles and giving gifts, originating with Royalty, soon inspired private homes.



Many pre-Christian cultures celebrated mid winter festivals to mark the Winter Solstice – the optimism from the time of year when the days get “longer” light again. In 274 AD (CE) the Roman Emperor Aurelian establish the feast of Sol Invictus (the unconquered Sun) on 25<sup>th</sup> December.

Choosing 25<sup>th</sup> December was a strategic way for Christianization to co-opt and redirect the existing popular pagan holidays towards a Christian purpose. Christ Mass, as it was, began to be formally celebrated on 25<sup>th</sup> December 336 AD (CE) during the reign of Emperor Constantine.

The Bible does not specify a date for the birth of Jesus so the tradition of it being 25<sup>th</sup> December developed over time.

Modern UK Christmas is celebrated as a time for religious observation and a a secular event of very long standing, with many elements including Carol singing at services and in the community, food and drink – sometimes to excess of Christmas pudding and mince pies, now with extremes in Christmas lights and festive jumpers being worn. Not forgetting the Kings Speech to the nation, inclusive to all our communities at this special time.

Still with many traditions of German origin such as the Advent Calender, the Advent wreath, Christmas markets, carols like “Stille Nacht” (Silent Night) and of course “Gluhwein” (Mulled Wine).

And closing the German theme “Frohe Weihnachten und einen guten Rutsch (Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year)

