

Christmas has but who knows

much tradition, how it started?

Nutting out the history of festive season

By EMILY PRAIN

"ON the 11th day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 11 pipers piping" ... or was it the 11 faithful apostles?

Those familiar with the 12 Days of Christmas tune would put their money on the pipers but, as tradition would have it, it is actually the latter.

Let's take the Christmas ham - everybody knows somebody with a glaze recipe to die for, but why do we eat it?

The tradition is believed to have been started by northern European Germanic tribe as a tribute to Freyr, a god associated with boars, and was later seen by the Catholic Church as a test of truthful conversion from Judaism.

The festive season is full of traditions, and few know them better than Carlyle Gardens resident Lyn Payne, whose favourite custom each year is assembling the nativity scene.

"I first started 25 years ago, when it became an 'in thing' for a house to be decorated," she said.

Over the years, Miss Payne has collected giant illuminated Christmas figures for the nativity, including the Star of David, Joseph, Mary and the Three Wise Men, who she assembles each year in the administration building of the retirement village.

"Every year there is a new piece, and everyone has to figure out what it is," she said.



CARLYLE GARDENS: Jocelyn Scott-Wright and Lyn Payne created the nativity scene at Carlyle Gardens over the course of a week.

Photos: Max Fleet BUN021211NAT8

Every statue is carefully placed - the guiding star shines on the backs of the Three Wise Men, and angels high up near the roof watch down on the baby Jesus.

This collection takes Miss Payne about a week to perfect, and she is traditional when it came to setting up and taking down the display.

"I don't like to have the lights on until December 1 and I take it down on the 12th day of Christmas," she said.

she said.

There are plenty of Christmas traditions many of us couldn't do without, but give little thought to, and few are as visible as Santa Claus.

Santa got his

origins from St Nicholas, a Greek Christian bishop in the 4th century who was famous for giving gifts to the poor. The plump, jolly fellow we recognise today was made popular in the US and Canada, influenced largely by caricaturist Thomas Nast.

It also wouldn't be Christmas without a tree. The origins of Christmas trees have been traced back to Livonia (now Latvia and Estonia), where a men's organisation called the Brotherhood of Black-

heads erected a tree for the holidays and danced around it.

If you've just decorated your tree, and popped a star atop it, what you're doing is representing the host of angels or the Star of Bethlehem from the nativity.

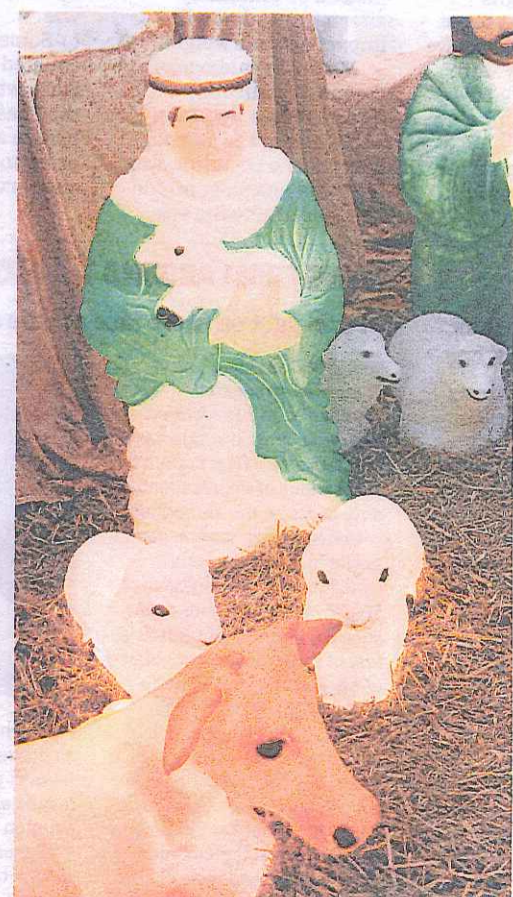
And if you like to give out candy canes, you're harking back to 17th century Europe, when it was often the done thing to adorn Christmas trees with food. This eventually developed into candy canes after it was made popular in Germany.



Photo: BUN021211NAT1



BUN021211NAT6



BUN021211NAT3