



Stratford Branch

New Zealand Society of Genealogists.

www.stratfordgenealogy.homestead.com

December 2015

Stratford Community House.

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Branch Contact-

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Convener's Comment

Our research in 2015 is coming to an end. There are a number of people who need to be thanked.

- a). Firstly the TET Trust who acknowledge our contributions to the local community via a Grant towards our rental.
- b). The Community House Trust, administrator Sally and other tenants all contribute towards making the House a pleasant place for us to have our Rooms.
- c). Our loyal members who attend meetings, donate resources for our Branch library, books to sell for fundraising etc.
- d). The members who actively make the Branch function ~ Marie and Helen who donate their indexing skills and their time at the Rooms each week; Lesley who assists in many ways on Saturdays; Newsletter editor Maureen; Treasurer Kate; Karen who collects "Stratford Press" items each week.

These people will be taking a well-earned break from 11th December-12 January, maybe even finding time to do some of their research!! I will be available to open the Rooms (by prior arrangement) for part of this period. Txt 027 318 4774 or phone me 765 0465 and leave a message if necessary.

May the spirit of Christmas be with you all.
Carol



Next Newsletter will be late January. If you have anything to go in it, please let Maureen know.

Next Branch Meeting—Wednesday 10th February starting at 5.30pm—Picnic Tea at Old Midhirst Cemetery followed by talk about some of the 'residents'! If you need a ride please contact Carol.

Branch Rooms

The Stratford Branch Rooms open

Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am – 3pm;

Saturdays 12 noon -2pm.

Our Branch Newsletter is now available each month on our web page-

www.stratfordgenealogy.homestead.com

Inside this issue:

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Christmas

NB: Rooms close on Friday 11th December. Reopen on Tuesday 12th January

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The Beginnings of Christmas:

When the early Christian Church was in its formative stages, a number of dates were suggested as being the most likely date of Christ's birth. The actual date had been forgotten over time. In 350 A.D. Pope Julius I decreed that from that time forth the 25th of December would be acknowledged as the date of the Nativity. All of Christendom accepted that decree except for the Armenian church. To that denomination, the Nativity is celebrated on January 6 each year. It should be noted that Julius I's decree came only thirty-seven years after Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration which effectively legalized the Christian religion. Prior to that time anyone who professed the Christian religion were persecuted. In 303 A.D. the Nativity was "celebrated" by Emperor Diocletian by having nearly 20,000 Christians burned to death.



The 25th of December was chosen by Pope Julius I partly to counter or replace the festivals normally celebrated on or near that date. The day was commonly known throughout the Persian Empire as the Dies Solis Invicti Nati, or the Birthday Of The Unconquered Sun. The Romans celebrated the Saturnalia at that time of year because a solar solstice occurs about that time. In Mesopotamia, the people celebrated their god Marduk's struggle against the forces of chaos. The Greeks believed that the latter part of December was when the god, Zeus, would renew his annual battle against Kronos and the Titans. The effort by the Christian Pope to counter these established holidays with a solemn celebration of the Nativity was intended to purge the world of the debauchery and Saturnalia, in particular, drunken revelries and raucousness that they induced in the general populace. The latter, was very hedonistic; people indulged in all manner of (often gaily) parties and exchanged gifts with one another.



The intention of a sudden change on the "pagan" customs with rituals not be removed. As a result of this approach, many of the traditions we indulge in today come from sources originally not part of the Christian tradition.

the Christian leaders like Pope Julius I was not to force a sudden change on the common people. Instead, they hoped to gradually replace the pagan ones. Gregory the Great wrote, in 597, that the pagan "upon the sudden", but rather be adapted "to the praise of God."

The lights on the Christmas tree are descended from candles, which descend themselves from the Norse belief in lighting fires to help Woden and Thor battle the evil of winter.



Presents given out at Christmas descends from the Saturnalian practice of exchanging gifts.

The decoration of our homes with evergreens descends from the early Celtic belief that the harsh effects of winter could be wished away with the plants that did not lose their green colour. The colours we cherish as Christmas colours, red and green, comes from the holly plant's berries and leaves. The holly plant was revered by the early Romans and hung about their houses during the Saturnalia, supposedly to ward off witchcraft. During the Medieval Ages the legend was spread that the holly first sprang up in the footsteps of Jesus as he was led to the cross; the spiny leaves symbolizing the crown of thorns and the red berries recalling His blood.

The shiny, glittering balls that are hung on the Christmas tree are believed to derive from the bags of gold which the 4th century St. Nicholas gave to serve as dowries for three daughters of a poor man.



*A
Merry and
blessed Christ-
mas to you all,
and a happy New
Year.*