

# The Bush

A K Hamilton Jenkin "Cornwall and its People" Published 1934

In Cornwall the tradition of hanging up the "Bush" goes back to a pagan festival celebrating the Winter Solstice.

The construction of the bush is a memento of the practice of human sacrifice practiced by the Celts before the coming of Christianity. Great cages of withies were fashioned in the likeness of the gods and into these human victims were crowded and at midnight on the solstice eve they would be burnt as an offering to the solar deity in order that he might furnish the god with renewed power to rejuvenate the soil. So the "Bush" just like the Hobby Hoss (which in tradition was also made of withies) is a celebration of the coming of the sun god and new life. With the introduction of Christianity the tradition was adapted by the first Christian missionaries who just like the Bards before them would cut Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe bushes using a bronze sickle and then bless the cuttings before handing them to the people who would take them home to make the bush. Now the bush was used to celebrate the new life that had come with the birth of the baby Jesus. So like many of the old traditions yet another was used by the church as a way of letting the people continue to use the old practice of their new faith.

Use willow canes to make two hoops. Fasten these one inside the other to make a ball shape. Decorate the hoops with Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe which were believed by the old ones to have magical powers as they stayed green when everything around them was dying. Wrap the holly and the ivy around the hoops and fastened an apple inside the top and hang the mistletoe below the hoops.

On Solstice eve the 20th of December, secure the bush to the ceiling and taking great care, fastened a red candle inside the bush and light just before midnight then form a ring and dance under the bush welcoming the rebirth of the God of Light. Make sure you extinguish the candle before leaving the room.

The Christmas bush. The latter when properly constructed, consists of two little wooden hoops fastened one into the other at right angles, the framework thus formed being decorated with evergreens, furze blossom, apples, oranges, etc. This pleasing form of decoration, which is known in some districts as the 'kissing bush', is usually suspended in the front window of the house, and when illuminated at night by a lighted candle set inside it, has a peculiarly festive appearance. Considering how easily and cheaply the bush can be

made, it is regrettable that this old British form of decoration should have been so widely supplanted by its German counterpart – the Christmas tree.