

The Bush

By Gladys Hunkin (Winner of an Old Cornwall competition 1967)

If there is one experience more joyous than returning home at Christmas it is to be there to welcome a loved one after a long absence. I close my eyes and see my brother and two sisters and myself racing to meet my father home from his ship. Memory revives the fresh sea-scent he brought with him for, as Kipling says, Smells are surer than sounds and sights to make the heart-strings crack." Once more he had arrived for Christmas in time to make for us the Cornish Bush an old custom, depicted in Mordon's drawing.

The Bush, known much earlier than the Victorian Christmas tree, was made by interlinking two wooden hoops at right angles and tying them firmly together; the hollow globe of four curves thus formed was covered in twists of red crinkled paper and decorated along the staves with holly, ivy or other evergreens. I do not recollect mistletoe, though I have heard it called The Kissing Bough." Fruit such as red apples and oranges was added, and the sparkling shining balls unknown in earlier days. Our presents also adorned the dainty structure which was hung in a window. One red candle inside at the base was lit after dark, and I recall this once caused a near-tragedy by setting the whole thing ablaze—no candle after that! I believe we thought the light welcomed the Infant Christ on his way to Bethlehem.

When I returned to my native county I made one of these bushes "and was asked ironically if it signified RIP – the Spirit of Christmas!" Another I made for a church bazaar was received with curiosity and interest.

I shall place Mordon's beautiful drawing with other nostalgic treasures – the naval button, the wisp of my mother's dark hair, with no trace of grey, cut on her golden wedding, the dried scrap of Cornish heather. I now embalm them all afresh with this recollection of a happy childhood.