

Country Notes for December 2021

As December progresses, Christmas decorations start to appear in homes throughout the country, and Hollingbourne and Hucking are no exception! Despite the huge choice available these days there is no doubt that for many people the natural options of holly, ivy and mistletoe, plus the Victorian addition of the Norway Spruce, remain very popular.

Mistletoe has always had romantic connotations, one of which is that after each kiss the man should remove one berry. When all the berries have gone the mistletoe loses its power! There are many other traditions associated with this plant. It should, for example, only be cut with gold scissors – and certainly never iron. I wonder how much mistletoe in the shops really is cut with gold scissors? I don't imagine that there are many people who even possess a pair! When cut the mistletoe should never be allowed to touch the ground, but should always be caught in a sheet.

Mistletoe is a semi parasitic plant. Whilst it does rely on its host, it also gains some nourishment through its own leaves. Apple trees are often the favoured tree, although strangely not pear trees. Mistletoe is seldom seen in the summer when the leaves are on the trees, and even in the winter careful examination of a tree can often reveal that what was at first thought to be mistletoe is in fact a squirrels dray, high up in the tree.

Propagation is often by birds which try to remove the outer fruit to get to the seed, get the sticky outer on their beaks and try to wipe it off by using the bark of a tree. If the berry gets into the right place another mistletoe bough has been born!

Whatever your choice of decoration, I hope that you all have a very merry Christmas!

Andrew G Snowdon