

Country Notes for December 2018

One of the great joys surrounding December and the approach of Christmas is that we are able to sing yet again all the wonderful carols celebrating the birth of Jesus. This year I shall especially enjoy joining with others as we sing our way from 'Tree to Tree' in Hollingbourne on Wednesday 19th December. What a treat for us all!

Looking at the huge number and variety of carols, it becomes immediately apparent, quite rightly, how closely the birth of Jesus is connected to nature and country themes. 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' refers to the 'silent stars' going by. 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter' refers to frosty wind, water like a stone and snow falling, snow on snow! The ox, ass and camel are all mentioned and the shepherds bring a lamb as a present. In 'The Little Road to Bethlehem' the lambs were coming homewards one by one. 'While Shepherds Watched their Flocks' refers to the flocks which they were guarding at the time and in 'O Come All Ye Faithful' they leave their flocks to come to the manger.

In 'Once in Royal David's City' the oxen are 'standing by'. In 'Away in a Manger' the cattle are lowing and there is even a carol by Benjamin Britain called 'The Oxen'! In 'A Somerset Carol' the oxen feed on hay as the saviour is born, as they do in 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen'.

In 'Joy to the World' fields and floods, rocks and hills and plains repeat the sounding joy and nature 'sings'! In another well-known carol we are told that 'King Jesus Hath a Garden' - very sensible too! 'The Sans Day Carol' reminds us that the holly bears a berry and that the first tree in the greenwood was the holly. We are similarly reminded in 'The Holly and the Ivy'.

'The Twelve Days of Christmas' includes a whole menagerie of animals including turtle doves, partridges and geese!

My favourite carol in recent years has been 'The Shepherds Carol' by Bob Chilcott which speaks of the 'frosty meadows that winter had won'. Do listen to it if you get the chance - it is truly beautiful!

All of which reminds me to wish you a happy Christmas. I hope that you all find a moment to get out and enjoy the wonders of nature at this glorious time of year!

Andrew Snowdon