

Europe Direct Christmas Tree Decoration Exchange 2014



Very best wishes from Italy!



Europe Direct Leeds' Christmas Tree and its decorations on show in the Central Library's foyer. The map shows how far some of the decorations have travelled to find their home on our tree!



This display in Chapel Allerton Library shows some of the letters, information and decorations which the local school received from schools across Europe

The **Europe Direct Christmas Tree Decoration Exchange** is an annual project, in which thousands of primary school pupils create hand-made Christmas tree decorations, and exchange them with schools in other European countries. Teachers display the decorations they receive on their schools' trees, alongside a display of European songs, traditions and recipes written by the children themselves - helping children to learn not only how Christmas is celebrated in other European countries, but also about other places, languages, cultures and traditions, and what it means to be a European citizen.

Our 2014 **European Christmas Tree Decoration Exchange** is the biggest yet! Around 275 schools are taking part from across 19 different European member states. There are 55 different European regions participating - with local co-ordination of the project by 55 Europe Direct Information Centres!

Chapel Allerton Primary School is one of the local schools taking part in the Exchange, with the assistance of **Europe Direct Leeds** and the Library service. Here is what they had to say, "This has been a fantastic project to be involved in and all of the children have very much enjoyed making a decoration to be sent to another school in Europe. We were part of Group 8 with 31 other schools and each child made a decoration, wrote a report about Christmas in England and a Yorkshire pudding recipe. These were put into packages and sent off by Chapel Allerton Library. In return, we have received 31 packages from countries such as Romania, Poland, Italy, Spain, etc! Each package contained a decoration and information about how that country celebrates at Christmas, as well as songs, videos, recipes and Christmas cards."

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Some of the decorations made by the Peer Support Cultural Partnership group during their meetings at the Central Library

In order to make our contribution, **Europe Direct Leeds** also worked with the **Peer Support Cultural Partnership**. This is a partnership between Leeds Libraries and Information Service, Leeds Museums and Galleries, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Adult Social Care. It offers creative projects to help people to **live well with dementia**. Some of the support groups are open to both a person living with dementia and their carer, partner or a family member.

The theme for our meetings in the autumn 2014 quarter, starting in October, was **Festivals**. We looked at celebrations for birthdays, Mother's day and Father's day and considered secular celebrations as well as faith ones, ending with **Christmas**.

At one of the October meetings - **80 days of Christmas** – we talked about how different countries around the world celebrate Christmas. For another October meeting, we invited **Lion Learners** (who offer hands on animal education and entertainment across Yorkshire to adults and children) to bring along some of the animals people buy as gifts for Christmas, to highlight the time and patience needed to care for them properly and the changes to one's lifestyle that are involved, without which animals can end up abandoned and in shelters.

At our sessions in November we made **Christmas decorations** for the Exchange. These went to schools across Europe. Some were kept back to be displayed on our tree at the Central Library, along with the items we received. During the sessions there was lively discussion about the **customs and traditions** associated with Christmas and what it meant to them when they were growing up. They shared stories of excitement and worry about what they might, *or might not*, receive as presents. Most of the participants are in excess of 70 years old and, since they were born during the war or just after, were not afforded much luxury at Christmas. However, they were all able to hang a stocking, or pillowcase, at the end of their beds, into which Father Christmas would pop small toys, fruit and games for them to enjoy on Christmas morning. It was considered a great treat to receive a clementine, satsuma, or an orange, as these were rationed. In return, a mince pie, a glass of sherry or whisky and a carrot would be left out for Father Christmas and his reindeer. Some of the favourite presents they received when they were young included dolls, bikes, footballs and a peddle car. Originally, Boxing Day was the day when you would give gifts to tradesmen, the armed forces and friends.

Other traditions they recalled included: 'crossing' the base of Brussels sprouts before cooking to 'bless' them (and get them to cook evenly); chestnuts were roasted and often served up with Brussels sprouts, or just on their own, because not all of them liked sprouts!; a candle was lit every Sunday in December leading up to Christmas; decorations were put up 12 days before Christmas Day and taken down 12 days after; homemade decorations included paper chains links, made from colourful card, and strung across the walls, with Christmas cards attached; their homes were often cleaned from top to bottom in the run up to Christmas, with fresh bedding put on every bed; many of the group remember the Salvation Army going along their streets singing carols.

The Central Library's Christmas Cracker!



Held on the Ground Floor of Leeds Central Library on Wednesday 17th December, a varied audience of library regulars and other members of the public attended, lured by printed and social media publicity.

There were readings from Central librarians, Christmas carols and songs (including "Stille Nacht" and "O Tannenbaum") from Central's Christmas Choir (assembled especially for the evening) and a solo rendition of "In the Bleak Midwinter" with violin accompaniment.

They also enjoyed the "Frozen in Time" exhibition whilst enjoying the free refreshments provided by **Europe Direct Leeds**. **Inkwell Arts** (www.inkwellarts.org.uk) provided craft stalls for those who hadn't finished their Christmas shopping.

Check out our clips of the Central Library's Christmas Choir and the rendition of "In the Bleak Midwinter" at www.youtube.com/user/europedirectleeds