

BANISHING WINTER

In December, when days shortened and temperatures fell, northern European peoples practised pagan rituals intended to banish winter and restore light to the earth. They sang and danced to deter evil spirits and invoke the sun, and fashioned evergreen wreaths, studded with lighted candles, symbolising the return of spring and new life.



In the 4th Century, Christmas Day was fixed as 25 December, probably a shrewd move to lessen the hold of pagan winter rituals throughout the Roman empire. Nevertheless, the evergreen wreath and many other pagan rituals remain a traditional part of Christmas celebrations and today, irrespective of belief, people across the world gather in December to celebrate the dying year and anticipate the year to come.

Rotherham u3a's festivities begin at 7.30pm on 1 December, when the Choir holds its eagerly anticipated Christmas Concert at Herringthorpe United Reformed Church. As always, it promises to be a not-to-be-missed occasion featuring a medley of Christmas music, old and new. All are welcome. Tickets cost £7.50, via Julie Thorp 07733 262 080. Proceeds go to a Local Charity.

Throughout December, activity groups hold their own celebrations, but 15 December is members' party day. After a festive meal, the Singing for Fun and Ukulele groups each present a programme of seasonal and other songs, prompting an enthusiastic sing-along. Singing for Fun's energetic rendition of a humorous version of "The 12 days of Christmas" is an annual treat. The Ukulele group, fresh from their Christmas "tour" of various local community groups, will add their tuneful mix of melodies past and present to make this a fun-filled festive occasion.

Learn, Laugh and Live with the u3a