

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF COLLECTING CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS.



For over 60 years now, Seaford resident, Geoff Stonebanks, has been creating Christmas Magic in his homes, from the early 1980's right up to the present day. In addition, as a child, from the early 1960's, in his parent's public house in Oxfordshire until they retired in the late 80's.

With a vast collection, that was begun in the late 1950's, including home made gifts from family members and many purchases from Woolworths to decorate the Dolphin Public House, Geoff now curates a collection of over 40 crates of memorabilia (some

dating back to the 1930's purchased in Prague) and no fewer than over 25 assorted artificial Christmas trees of varying heights.

Pictured below, on the television (from 1968) and again in 2023 in a cabinet, is a small tree that was purchased in Woolworths in the early 1960's with some of the decorations from the 60's.

The small Pierrot figure pictured was made as a gift tag for a Christmas present Geoff received from his paternal grandmother, Elsie Stonebanks, back in 1963 and was made from a ping pong ball, some felt and pipe cleaners. It has been treasured now for 60 years and looks as good as new. The small yellow church and the 2 glass figures were gifts from his maternal grandmother, Dorothy Brooker, back in the 60's too.



Once Geoff moved away from home in the 70's, he began buying his own decorations and when his parents retired, he inherited those that had decorated the pub.

Fast forward to 2017 and Geoff decided to try and get some publicity for the large collection and created his own Christmas web site (www.geoffschristmas.co.uk)



Little did he know that his trees would end up on page 3 of the Daily Mail on 23rd December that year. A journalist from the Mail contacted Geoff and arranged to come and shoot his collection for a feature. At the time of the shoot, the trees were dressed across 4 different rooms. Once the Mail's picture editor saw the images, they asked if all the trees could be moved into one room! Geoff initially declined, as it was a huge undertaking, until they offered a large amount of money to complete the task! As you see, it was done and a great image was created. That same year, Juliette Parkin came



and filmed a news item for BBC SE Today, which was broadcast on the 15th December.

Roll on to 2018 and there were features posted online with both The Daily Express and Mail online, the image below left was taken by John Glover that year and the picture of Geoff with tinsel, at start of feature by Paul Davey of SWNS for Mail online.

By 2020, things began to hot up with Athena Films (a production company commissioned by Channel 5) approaching Geoff to include his collection in an hour long documentary, along with other collectors, entitled “**Incredible Christmas Trees and How to decorate them.**” Two images below. The programme was broadcast on 28th November 2020 and can be viewed via Geoff’s website.



Following the broadcast of the C5 programme, I was invited to join Holly and Phil, live on This Morning, on Wednesday 2nd December. Bearing in mind it was Covid year, the coverage was filmed from my iPhone, set up in the house, so sadly not fantastic quality. I gave them a quick tour of the 3 decorated rooms.

By 2021, Sussex Life decided to publish a 2-page feature on the growing collection and C5 repeated the show Incredible Christmas Trees and how to decorate them on 21st December.

2022 was quite an amazing year too with the German national TV broadcaster, ZDF contacting me in late October and seeking to make a film about getting the decorations out of store and setting them up around the house. They ultimately visited twice, once to film setting the decorations up and again to film the finished rooms. The resulting film aired on their **Mittags Magazine** lunchtime programme in Germany on the 9th December.



In light of the success in getting a German national broadcaster to visit and film the collection, BBC SE Today contacted me with a view to revisit with Chrissie Reidy interviewing me for a film that was broadcast on the local news. The resulting piece aired on the 6th December.



Later in the month, the Jeremy Vine Show on C5 were having a debate about Christmas tinsel and invited me to participate, live from home. The session was filmed again via my iPhone relayed back to the studio.

The most significant year by far though was last year, 2023, when there was a great deal of interest in talking about my collection.

It all began with some great coverage in the Metro newspaper on 1st December quickly followed by a feature online in the Daily Express on the 9th of the month and an interview on Heart Radio with JK and Kelly Brook on the 18th. Amazingly, a Norwegian reporter contacted Geoff too and published a great feature in that countries **Dagbladet** newspaper on the 4th December.

On 7th December ITV Meridian decided to come and film a segment on the collection which aired on the local news that evening. Charlie Wilkins was the reporter who came along and interviewed me about my large collection.



This then prompted ITV's **This Morning** to make another approach, with a view to sending a cameraman to film live on the show on the 18th December. The programme hosts that day were Josie Gibson and Craig Doyle. After being filmed across the 3 decorated rooms we ended top in the lounge, when the cameraman presented me with a gift from the programme, live on air, of a "This Morning" silver bauble to add to my collection.



2023 was then topped off with an appearance, live from home, on Christmas morning on Sky News, talking about my Christmas decoration collection with Gillian Joseph. I'd set up my own small studio in one of the rooms at home and the broadcast was relayed through my laptop to the studio.



All in all quite an amazing backstory for my 60 year addiction to Christmas decorations. Below are some images of my collection over the years.

A plastic Woolworths tree topping angel for the 1960's. A vintage Christmas tablecloth that belonged to my grandmother. A small pottery snowman made by me at school in the late 1950's and 2 glass baubles from Woolworths from the 1960's.



Following several Christmases spent in Washington DC through the late 1990's, I became interested in the official White House tree decorations issued each year by the White House Historical Association. I now have every decoration from 1992 to date which are displayed on a grey wire tree every year. An image of me, taken for SWNS agency in 2018 by Paul Davey and a SWNS image of me in Santa top. The three remaining images take by John Glover.



More details and images at www.geoffschristmas.co.uk