



He's a Christmas fanatic

Geoff Stonebanks and his dog Chester with the German film crew



Geoff being filmed



Nutcrackers and the weihnachtspyramide

ARGUS gardening writer Geoff Stonebanks has another pastime at this time of the year.

From an early age he has loved Christmas and over the years his amazing collection of decorations, some dating back to the 1930s, has drawn much media attention.

He has appeared on national TV appearances, including live on This Morning with Phillip Schofield and Holly Willoughby.

Through his childhood, Geoff's parents had a pub which his mother decorated for the festive period and he joined her in the task from the age of seven. Soon he took over and was left to his own devices.

The pub opened right over the Christmas period and customers came from far and wide to see his handiwork. When his parents retired in 1987, he inherited the pub's collection to add to his own.

This year though, Geoff, whose garden Driftwood is near Seaford, is going international. ZDF, the national German broadcaster has visited his home twice in recent weeks to film him emptying his 40 crates of decorations and setting up a couple of trees and to capture the finished look.

From hand-carved wooden nutcrackers to stollen, there are many German Christmas traditions which have been around for centuries. The German Christmas season begins with the first Sunday of Advent, which was November 27 this year; almost as early as Geoff's Christmas.

It takes him a week to get all the decorations up and ready to switch on by December 1. He has always had enough by New Year's Day and they start to come down.

In a nod to the filming, he has

adopted a slightly German feel to his festivities this year – Alina Nahler, a producer from ZDF's London office contacted him in early November, having discovered his back catalogue of Christmas media coverage online.

Geoff already had a small collection of nutcrackers, which according to German folklore, were given as keepsakes to bring luck to the family and protect the home. He also has a Christmas candle pyramid, known as the weihnachtspyramide. While the candle pyramid is popular throughout Europe now, it was originally found in the Erzgebirge, the Ore Mountains between Germany and the Czech Republic. The same area is also known for its wooden toy making tradition too. Luckily Geoff has a large collection of these wooden toy decorations.

Another German invention is the Advent calendar, designed to involve children in the festivities leading up to Christmas. Geoff has bought a new one every year since childhood and his 2022 version is quite special.

One of the most important Christmas traditions by far, is the decorated tree. The custom of an indoor tree was introduced into Britain by Prince Albert who came from Germany. Geoff has over 30 decorated trees of varying sizes and one out in the garden too.

This year, he has been posting an image a day to his social media channels, featuring Christmas decorations for each letter of the alphabet (Twitter driftwoodbysea, Facebook Geoff Stonebanks and Instagram Geoff_Stonebanks).

● Geoff's garden diary, page 19

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