

1999 to 2024 - 25 YEARS OF LOSTWITHIEL'S ADVENT WINDOWS

If you've moved into Lostwithiel in the last 25 years, you'll probably have noticed that from December 1st each year, numbered windows decorated with a Christmas theme and illuminated through the evening begin to appear on the main streets of the Town. Why?



Like the annual Christmas Pageant, Dickensian Evening and the more recent Christmas Tree Festival in St Barts, Lostwithiel's Advent Window Trail has evolved over the years, from someone's bright idea of a new way to celebrate Christmas and bring light and cheer to the dark days of December, into an established Lostwithiel tradition. The Christmas Pageant was devised in the 1980s by Rachel John, Cornish historian and Lostwithiel resident, while Dickensian Evening was introduced in the 2000s by Adrian Barratt of Deja Vu, longtime chair of Lostwithiel Business Group.

Lostwithiel Advent Window Trail started just as we entered the new Millennium, for Christmas 1999, and was the unplanned outcome of a small group of friends – young mothers in those days – meeting up to enjoy trying different crafts and socialising, without children and husbands in tow. One of us – Ruth Edward-Collins – mentioned a town she'd seen in her native Switzerland, where a different window was decorated and lit on a Christmas theme each day throughout Advent, turning the town into a real life Advent Calendar, and how pretty it was.

Several glasses of wine later, Lostwithiel's own Advent Window Trail was born. Undeterred by the fact that of the four of us, only Gina O'Keeffe had a suitable window visible from the street, ideas began to flow and weeks of organisation began. We recruited and enthused 24 people in Town with suitable windows for decoration, either to create an Advent Window themselves or to allow one of us to decorate it for them.

One of Gina's daughters created the original holly wreath Number logo to be placed in each window on the Trail, and on



December 1st 1999 the first themed window lit up on schedule. We think it was either Trewithen Restaurant or Jeffery's Estate Agent – and each evening from then through to Christmas Eve a new and delightful window scene lit up each evening for people to discover and enjoy, all over Town.

I created two Advent Windows that year – the Three Kings in

'stained glass' with Playgroup at the Community Centre, and four huge Angels in Gwen Taylor's window in Bodmin Hill. Gina and her daughters set up a Dollhouse Miniature Christmas in her Quay Street window, while Jenni Greenhalgh and Ruth – if I recall – devised illuminated windows for 11 North Street and Duchy Mo-



tors' showroom window at Bridgend. Many more have followed in different locations every year since.

There was great enthusiasm for our idea, and many people



volunteered, with the most fantastic and intricate creative ideas over the years for their illuminated windows. Each year a few would drop out, and others take over their date. For the first decade or so, more private households took part than businesses, and the Advent Window Trail wandered all over Town, from the lower reaches of Bodmin Hill and Grenville Road to the Community Centre and even Mill Hill, as well as Fore Street, North Street, Quay Street and Queen Street in the centre. Even better, lots of people not part of the Advent Trail as such began to decorate and illuminate

Christmas windows too, adding to the seasonal cheer.

By 2011 our lives had moved on and were even busier, and we handed over the organisation of each year's Trail to Marianne Barratt of Deja Vu; more recently Sally Cuthbertson of Asquiths has taken on this role. Perhaps inevitably the balance has gradually shifted, with most windows now allocated to businesses on the main streets; we've noticed that the original idea of a new window to be revealed each evening on the allocated date like an Advent Calendar isn't always adhered to . . .

However the four of us – Ruth, Jenni, Gina and Debenie – have continued to meet up to create a new theme for our Advent Window every year for the past quarter century; you can see our 25th Silver Anniversary window at Gina's house on Quay Street from December 19th . It's always a challenge, a few tense moments, and a lot of fun trying to think of something new and then making it work. But it's the most lovely Christmassy thing to do for the Town, and we can't quite believe we're still doing it, 25 years on!

And the future? Well, times change, people age, lives go in different directions . . . so who knows? We'd love to see more Lostwithiel households taking part again in different streets, as well as local businesses, for every different decorated window adds to the interest and enjoyment of Lostwithiel at Christmas.