

merry CHRISTMAS!

Season's Greetings to all our readers from the puzzling team at Lovatts and YouPlay. Here we are hanging around the tree, wishing you a very Happy Christmas and a Puzzling New Year for 2009. Here are some interesting facts about the traditions of Christmas:

The **Christmas Cracker** is 161 years old this year. It was invented by English baker Tom Smith, who first sold wrapped sweets and added mottoes into the wrappers. When he heard the crackle of a log in the fire, he was inspired to invent the crack of the banger, a strip of paper impregnated with chemicals, which would crack when opened. Sweets were replaced with small gifts and the first Christmas crackers went on sale in London in 1847. Witty sayings or jokes were added and Tom Smith's son Walter included paper hats.

The **Candy Cane** goes back 338 years to Germany. In Cologne Cathedral back in 1670, the choirmaster was nervous because the young children attending the nativity pageant were become restless, so he gave them a white candy stick bent into the shape of a shepherd's crook. This was a popular move and became a tradition throughout Europe.

Kissing under the mistletoe is much older than that. It's been a popular pastime from ancient times, when the Druids regarded it as a fertility herb and a remedy against poisons. It was considered to be a cause of wonder for a parasitic plant, because it remained green throughout the winter while the tree it grew on did not. It's found in all parts of Australia except Tasmania, and all around New Zealand. So find a sprig, stand under it, close your eyes and see what happens.

