

# World's oldest Christmas tree makes a welcome return... for the 124th year

Families all over the country follow the same annual tradition of getting the artificial Christmas tree out of its box when the time comes to put up the decorations.

But the Parker family has been doing it longer than any other because they are still using a tree they first bought in 1886.

Complete with the original baubles and tinsel, their 14 inch tree is in its 124th year and has been authenticated as the world's oldest imitation Christmas tree.



Old faithful: The world's oldest artificial Christmas tree is in its 124th year

It cost six pence when it was bought in the mid-Victorian era but was last valued at £1,000 by experts at the Antiques Road Show in 2005.

Owner Paul Parker received the delicate ornament after his mother, Janet, passed away at the age of 69 in 2008, and is the third generation of his family to enjoy it.

Displaying the tree for the first time since his mother's death, Mr Parker is delighted to be carrying on the family tradition.

'I will proudly be displaying the tree this year,' said Mr Parker, 45, a mathematician from Bath.

'My mother treasured it when she was alive and my father Grahame is comforted that I will be carrying on the family tradition.

'It may not look like much but it has been part of our Christmas celebrations for so many years.



*Family tradition: Janet Parker pictured with the tree in 1967 and, right, Paul Parker's Great Great Aunt Lou Hicks, who first purchased the tree in 1886*

'It was one of those things that we just grew up with.

'But everything changed when mum saw an advert in the local paper asking for the oldest decorations.

'She thought that our old Christmas tree could be important - and she was right.'

The ornamental tree was first bought by Mr Parker's great-great aunt Lou in 1886.

Aunt Lou passed the tree to her favourite grandniece, Janet, when she just a child in the 1940's.

It was taken out of its original box by Janet every year since then and son Paul has vowed to continue the tradition.



*Current owner: Paul Parker will display the tree above his fireplace this year*

The tree is made of green raffia, stands 14 inches tall and has a base featuring the traditional Christmas icons of cherubs, the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

The tree was first authenticated by Christie's auction house in London and then the Guinness Book of Records confirmed that the distinguished-looking ornament was indeed the oldest known artificial Christmas tree in the world.

'It was never meant as a replacement tree, it's ornamental,' said Mr Parker, who was given the tree by his 88-year-old father.

'Christmas really took off for the Victorians because of the influence of Prince Albert and the German tradition of the Tannenbaum Christmas tree.

'This little tree would have been produced for the same reason ornaments of nativity scenes were made, as a Christmas symbol for the family.'

The tree cost only six pence when it was bought in the mid-Victorian era.

By the time it was seen by experts at the Antiques Road Show in 2005 it was valued at £1,000.

'But putting a price to this kind of object is ridiculous,' said Mr Parker. As the oldest Christmas tree in history it has no peers. There really is nothing to compare to it.'

'If two Christmas obsessives were bidding against each other they might very well carry on till next Christmas.'

On Christmas day 2010 the aged tree will be on display on the mantel piece of Mr Parker home as he shares a turkey dinner and glass of wine with his father.

**Source: *The Daily Mail* 2010**