

WOOD FUEL DEBATE HEATS UP

The approaching festive season puts Graham Ormondroyd in the mood to sit by a DEFRA-approved log-burning stove



So here we are again, another year has come and gone and we are all preparing to get into the Christmas spirit.

Well, kind of. As I sit here penning this it is October and the festive season is still a little far away, but like all good TV chefs filming their Christmas specials in June, I will don my Christmas jumper, heat up the mulled wine, put on some appropriate music and endeavour to let the Christmas spirit in.

To get myself in the mood I had a read of John's delightful festive article from last year, packed with snippets on how wood science is interwoven with the Christmas period. Maybe it was the mulled wine, but images of the Yule log on a fire began to spring to mind.

The origins of the Yule log are unclear. It has been suggested that the custom could be "an enfeebled version of Celtic human sacrifices".

However, numerous scholars have traced the ritual of the Yule log back to pagan origins, Germanic pagan origins at that. (The Germans really have cornered the international Christmas scene, haven't they?)

How many of us will be heading to a German Christmas market in December to feast on Schnitzel and German beer?)

The Yule log traditionally was meant to be big enough to burn for the 12 days of Christmas, with part of the log being retained for the following year, warding off bad omens for 12 months before being used to kindle the next year's log.

Sadly, the burning of the Yule log, or any log for that matter, may well become a thing of the past in many urban areas. On September 28 it was reported that London mayor Sadiq Khan had, in a letter to the environment secretary, called for a ban on wood-burning stoves.

While this was later clarified to not be a total ban on domestic stoves but a call for education of users not to use their stoves at times of poor air quality, it will still have an adverse impact on the use of wood as a fuel throughout the country.

This could lead to homes and businesses reverting to the use of fossil fuel for heating purposes.

I have to agree with Dennis Milligan, of the Stove Industry Alliance, that surely a better target for the mayor would have been the exchange of open fires and low-quality stoves for high-quality, highly efficient burners.

Some of these more efficient burners can reduce emissions by 90% when compared with open fires.

One of the pieces that I read questioned, somewhat tongue-in-

Graham Ormondroyd is head of materials research at the BioComposites Centre, Bangor University and also a WTS board member and vice-chairman

check, "had he [the mayor] not considered our hygge"? This started me thinking about the current craze in the UK to embrace (in a cosy woolly jumper sort of way) all things Scandinavian and whether this has had an effect on the timber and timber products trade in the UK.

While everybody's favourite Swedish interior supermarket does not produce in the UK, striving for 'the Nordic look' must have a trickle-down effect on manufacture and sales of timber products in the UK.

This could be flooring, furniture, an intricate wooden piece of art or a timber-framed extension.

Perhaps the effects of such trends have never been studied. I can feel a research project coming on!

Well, if I am not in the Christmas mood, I am most certainly in the hygge mood, sitting watching the flames in the log burner (DEFRA-approved highly efficient, of course), sipping mulled wine and thinking that I can safely say that I am probably the first to wish you all, *Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year* ■

Below: Wood fuel



The Wood Technology Society

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