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Klausjagen

On December 5, the eve of St. Nicholas Day, the village of Küssnacht, on the shores of Lake Lucerne, glows in the light of some two hundred enormous, transparent bishops' mitres which have been artfully designed, cut out of

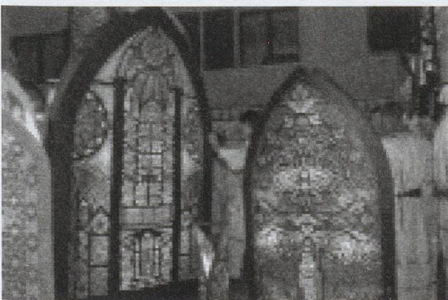
cardboard, put together, and lit by a candle from within.

found an association to maintain and preserve the Klausjagen custom. In its earlier and even current form, the custom reflects ancient cultic origins which are only superficially hidden by the appearance



Klausjagen

This Iffele, or headdress, is worn by the men and more recently women as well. They accompany St. Nicholas on his way through the village. The streets echo with the sound of heavy bells worn by strong men around their necks, horn blowing, and especially the triad rhythm of a brass band accompanying the chant of "Mänz, Mänz, Bodefridimänz".



Headdress or Iffele

Clemens (Mänz) Ulrich tried unsuccessfully in the 1920s to convert the wild chasing of St. Nicholas by village youths into something more civilized. His successors had better luck in 1928 when they

of St. Nicholas in his bishop's robes.

The Whipcrackers, whose noise proclaims the arrival of the procession, apparently share these same origins.



Hornblowers

I spent a few years in Meggen (LU), and from November onwards, the boys of the village were practising their Geislechlöpfe. I must say, a shudder runs up and down your spine when you hear it, on a dark, foggy November night. It sounds like a very old custom, from pre-Christian times, when our forbears feared the long, dark nights and were looking to protect themselves from the spirits of the dead.

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Shop atmosphere

There are many intriguing initiatives to help shoppers part with their money by the manipulation of 'atmospherics', from the colours, smells and lighting in the store to its layout and the playing of music. The use of the aroma of coffee and freshly baked bread to lure customers goes back to at least the 18th century, while the use of fresh herbs is even older. Today, many large stores pump the smell of fresh bread from the ovens to the entrance of the store to attract customers and set stomachs rumbling.

In the weeks running up to Christmas, the scent of cloves, cinnamon, brandy and other 'Christmassy' smells may also waft through the aisles. For Christmas 1995, a big chainstore used a system developed by BOC Gases to release a puff of mulled wine dissolved in carbon dioxide, each quarter of an hour. A panel of staff had decided that mulled wine created the right ambiance to put customers in a suitably festive mood.

Swinging Hams

A truck driver caught veering across motorway lanes told police he couldn't help driving erratically – because of 18 tonnes of hanging hams in the back of his lorry had started swinging rhythmically. He was allowed to drive on once his hams had settled.

