

This month I am inviting you to look at Redland's rooftops with a sense of anticipation. Redland's chimneys come in an amazing variety of sizes and styles, although most are terracotta, (how appropriate for Redland!) some are tall and thin - bad news for anticipatory children! The tradition of Santa Claus entering dwellings through the chimney was documented in a famous 17th century painting by the Dutch artist Jan Steens. Earlier traditions tell of Saint Nicholas tossing coins through a window, or if locked out, dropping presents down the chimney. The tradition of gifts coming down the chimney and appearing at the hearth probably harks back to the pagan belief of the hearth as a sacred source of beneficence. Of course the alternative option of Saint Nicholas or Santa entering through the window bearing gifts when nowadays many windows are double or even triple glazed, provides him with a new problem. A walk around Victorian and Edwardian Redland reveals more than twenty five different styles of chimney pots, ranging from elegant simplicity to Victorian baroque, some of which I have shown here. Get your children to see how many different styles they can spot and guess which would pose the biggest challenge for Santa Claus. But why so many different styles when ostensibly all the pots fulfil the same function? Homeowners moving into the new suburb of Redland valued anything that they considered would enhance their property, especially highly visible items such as decorative chimney pots, fancy ridge crests and finials. At that time coal was the main fuel and down draughts and cross winds from close-by houses often caused fires to smoke. As long ago as the 13th Century people realised the benefits of maximising the height of the chimney to minimise down-draught. Victorian builders resolved the problem by using fancy pots to add extra height to the chimney stack. Further improvements came in the form of a bewilderingly variety of shapes, patent designs with louvres, side and cross vents and so on. If you need a replacement pot or would like to learn more about this subject an interesting website is <http://users.breathe.com/brian.leverett/chimneys/history.htm> (copy and paste into your browser) 'Cherished Chimneys'. As well as sourcing old pots they have a museum.

Lastly, see if you can spot the pot with the very lifelike terracotta Dove on top, clue, it is on a main school route between Westbury Park and Henleaze school(s).

