Nil *Desperandum*

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Isolated but not alone

Photo Credit: Andrea Piacquadio, Budapest, Hungary: https://www.instagram.com/andreapiacquadio_/ andreapiacquadio_

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Continued:

A big black rock

Paul Hannah wrote on Quora.com, here, about the discovery of a rock with strange writing on it.

Picture Credit: https://qph.fs.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-2c6f2a02d839dea5294e05915c05f1cb-c

The discovery took place in 1799. This is what Paul Hannah wrote:

"Pierre-François Bouchard was a French soldier in Egypt with Napoleon's ill fated expedition. He discovered a big black rock. Now, rocks with writing on them are not an unusual find in Egypt. People have been finding such things for centuries. However nobody had been able to read the hieroglyphs on them. Incidentally that isn't a typo 'Hieroglyphs' is the noun form describing Ancient Egyptian writing Hieroglyphic is the adjective.

"Scholars have been trying to translate Egyptian hieroglyphs for over a thousand years and nobody had come close. This is because they look like this:

Image Credit: https://qph.fs.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-3dc1b02b4495896b3c69901db646c9d4-c

"And that would be interpreted as a feather, a snake a hand and an owl. The first object isn;'t even a feather, it is a flowering reed and represents a letter something like Y. The snake is a viper and represents the letter F, the hand = D and the owl = M. YFDM You can see how difficult it would be to translate this.

"But back to the rock.

"What was unusual about this particular rock is that it had three different kinds of writing Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphic. Scholars knew two of them and as they said the same thing, it was reasonable to assume that the Hieroglyphic text did too. A few people tried and failed, but then along came Jean-François Champollion - a French dude, and he cracked the code.

As a result we can now read ancient Egyptian as well as we can ancient Greek."

The man who discovered California

Picture Credit: "Cabrillo Statue" by FotoGrazio is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

In September 1542, explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, landed near what is now known as San Diego and became the first European to set foot on the west coast of what would become the United States.

Cabrillo was a soldier and explorer engaged in the service of Spain. Brittanica.com says this about him: *"Virtually nothing definitive is known of Cabrillo's early life. Although more than one village in Portugal has claimed to be his birthplace, scholars have long debated whether he was of Spanish or Portuguese origin.*

"As a young man, he appears to have accompanied the Spanish soldier Pánfilo de Narváez (1520) in his unsuccessful punitive expedition against Hernán Cortés, conqueror of the Aztecs of Mexico. He was evidently one of the conquerors of the region now comprising Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. He also may have served for a time as governor of Guatemala.

"It is thought that Cabrillo embarked from the Mexican port of Navidad in June 1542, explored most of the coast of what is now the state of California, entered San Diego and Monterey bays, and landed on several of the islands near the California coast. He apparently died of complications from a broken leg suffered on one such landing."*

* In early 1543

Researched and written by Martin Pollins

A Viking called 'Ivar the Boneless'

Excerpted from the story about Ivar that appeared on the web at:
https://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-figures/ivar-boneless.htm

Picture Credit: Screenshot from YouTube video at: https://youtu.be/I6JKbGMkSPo

Ivar the Boneless is thought to have been among the Vikings who landed on the English coast in the 9th century. He was one of the breakout characters from "*Vikings*", a History Channel drama that ended its 6-season run in 2020. Ivar played by Alex Høgh Andersen.

The series depicts Ivar as a master tactician, a ruthless killer and a formidable foe on any battlefield, all of which was very impressive for a Viking who could barely walk.

Andersen's Ivar has a lifelong medical condition that's rendered his legs useless. To get around, Ivar crawls, rides in chariots or hobbles on crutches. Despite this, he leads the "Great Heathen Army" in seasons four and five.

Ivar the Boneless was a real person but nobody knows why he got his name. He may have been disabled, and maybe he wasn't. As the source article says: *'like a lot of period dramas, the "Vikings" television show uses speculation and fantasy to plug gaps in our historical knowledge.'* Ivar is known from Old Norse and medieval Latin sources as the son of the legendary Viking king Ragnar Lothbrok: in these stories he was raiding alongside his father and brothers and became the ruler of York in England in the 9th century CE.

The heyday of the Vikings began in the late 700s C.E. — as did the earliest known Viking raids. "The rapid Scandinavian expansion into Europe and beyond, starting in the 8th century but most pronounced as of the 9th century, was certainly violent," says Teva Vidal, a historian who specialises in medieval studies and the Viking world. He adds: "*Raids happened. Stuff was stolen. Buildings were burnt and destroyed. People were killed. The Vikings did have a particular ability to inflict damage in their hit-and-run raids, at least at first. But the people they attacked adapted and responded in kind. You see, the Vikings were violent ... but no more violent than anyone else at the time. They were a product of the early medieval world, and no more, no less violent than anyone else they had dealings with.*"

Talking of violence: according to historian Clare Downham, a historian at the University of Liverpool "*Ivar was said to have led the army that captured King Edmund of East Anglia after battle in 869 and had him tied to a tree for his soldiers to use as target practice.*

MORE INFORMATION:

- Video: Watch *Vikings: Bishop Heahmund Meets Ivar The Boneless In Battle* at: https://yout/u.be/I6JKbGMkSPo
- Story on Ancient History Encylopedia at: https://www.ancient.eu/Ivar_the_Boneless/

Did you know? People learn faster when not told what choices to make

Michele Solis, writing for Scientific American at https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/we-learn-faster-when-we-arent-told-what-choices-to-make/ says:

"In a perfect world, we would learn from success and failure alike. Both hold instructive lessons and provide needed reality checks that may safeguard our decisions from bad information or biased advice. But, alas, our brain doesn't work this way. Unlike an impartial outcome-weighing machine an engineer might design, it learns more from some experiences than others.

"A few of these biases may already sound familiar: A positivity bias causes us to weigh rewards more heavily than punishments. And a confirmation bias makes us take to heart outcomes that confirm what we thought was true to begin with but discount those that show we were wrong. A new study, however, peels away these biases to find a role for choice at their core.

"A bias related to the choices we make explains all the others, says Stefano Palminteri of the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM), who conducted a study published in Nature Human Behaviour in August 2020 that examines this tendency. "In a sense we have been perfecting our understanding of this bias," he says."

Found at:
https://science.slashdot.org/story/20/10/01/1841218/we-learn-faster-when-we-arent-told-what-choices-to-make

Ramanujan's square: Amazing!

First, please take a look at this:

RAMANUJAN'S MAGIC SQUARE

22	12	18	87
88	17	9	25
10	24	89	16
19	86	23	11

This square looks like any other normal magic square. But this is formed by great mathematician of our country – Srinivasa Ramanujan.

What is so great in it?

Then click here to discover some amazing things about it:
https://www.quora.com/q/damnthatsinteresting/What-are-some-amazing-coincidences-in-mathematics

Then scratch your head in disbelief!

The greatest mountaineer of our time

Picture Credit: Screenshot from The Guardian video at: https://youtu.be/KipLX-KBmzc

Nirmal "Nims" Purja MBE is a Nepalese mountaineer and former Gurkha and soldier of the Special Boat Service (SBS), an elite special forces unit of the Royal Navy.

What's remarkable is that he climbed all 14 of the world's mountains above 8,000-metres (called the eight-thousanders), in the record time of 6 months and 6 days and using bottled oxygen. The previous world record was 7 years.

Purja resigned from his military career in 2018 as a Lance Corporal to focus on mountaineering. He had made his first major climb in 2012, when he reached the summit of Lobuche East – remarkably, without any previous experience as a mountaineer.

With a plan to complete 14 summits in seven months, Purja made his first eight-thousander summit on 23rd April 2019.

Other than the fastest ascent with supplemental oxygen of the 14 tallest mountains in the world, Purja broke many other records – read about it at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirmal_Purja

READ MORE:

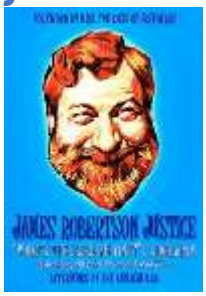
- https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/01/nirmal-nims-purja-speed-climber-worlds-14-highest-peaks-everest
- https://www.nimsdai.com/nirmal-purja-mbe
- https://www.outsideonline.com/2398616/nirmal-nims-purja-more-viral-photographer

WATCH THE VIDEO
https://youtu.be/KipLX-KBmzc

Where are they?

Went to the DIY shop the other week and asked in which section I could find tools, bricks and tiles. The chap said they were under Construction. I asked when they would be finished…

James Robertson Justice



James Robertson Justice was a British film actor, best known in comedies, where he would play the pompous authority-figure. He also co-starred with Gregory Peck in several adventure movies, notably *The Guns of Navarone.*

Picture Credit: https://pictures.abebooks.com/isbn/9780953192670-uk.jpg

James Robertson Justice was born James Norval Harald Justice in Lee, a suburb of Lewisham in South London, in 1907. The son of an Aberdeen-born geologist, he was named after his father. Educated at Marlborough College in Wiltshire, Justice studied science at University College London, but left after a year to became a geology student at the University of Bonn, where he again left after just a year. He spoke many languages (possibly up to 20) including Spanish, French, Greek, Danish, Russian, German, Italian, Dutch and Gaelic.

Justice returned to the UK in 1927, and became a journalist with Reuters in London, alongside Ian Fleming, the creator of James Bond. A year later, he emigrated to Canada, working as an insurance salesman, taught English at a boys' school, became a lumberjack and mined for gold. It's probable he didn't find any as he returned to Britain stony broke. Ice hockey caught his attention and in the early 1930s, he managed the national team at the 1932 Berlin European Championships to a 7th-place finish. Apart from his ice hockey exploits, he had played rugby for Beckenham RFC 1st XV in the 1924–25 season alongside Johnnie Cradock who would later become the partner of 1950s TV chef Fanny.

Upholding the law was next on the list as he left Britain again to become a policeman for the League of Nations in the Territory of the Saar Basin (a region of Germany occupied and governed by France and Germany under a League of Nations mandate originating in the Treaty of Versailles). After the Nazis came to power, he fought in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side. It was here that he first grew his signature trademark bushy beard, which he retained throughout his career. On return to Britain, he joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, but after sustaining an injury in 1943 (thought to be shrapnel from a German shell), he was pensioned off.

A biography entitled *James Robertson Justice—What's The Bleeding Time?* (referring to a line in the first Doctor film when he played *Sir Lancelot Spratt*) was published by Tomahawk Press on 3 March 2008. It was written by James Hogg, Robert Sellers and Howard Watson and is available at Abe Books..

He was prominent in Scottish public life, helping to launch Scottish TV and serving as Rector of the University of Edinburgh. A Ph.D., a journalist, a naturalist, an expert falconer, a racing car driver, a sportsman and an actor - he was certainly a man of many talents. He lived his life to the full but was made bankrupt in 1970, and died penniless in 1975. A very sad ending to a big man in every way!

Galaxies: Inside the Universe's Star Cities

From a book with that title, by David J. Eicher, published by Clarkson Potter, Copyright 2020 by David Eicher.

The revolution of Edwin Hubble, the man for whom the Hubble Space Telescope is named:

"On October 4, 1923, in ... [a Southern California] paradise, a brash young astronomer left his Pasadena house and trekked up to the Mount Wilson Observatory, not far from Los Angeles itself, to the 100-inch Hooker Telescope, at the time the largest telescope in the world. Originally from Missouri, Edwin Powell Hubble had moved to Illinois, graduated from the University of Chicago, and then earned a master's degree as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. He embarked on a career in astronomy only after returning to school at the age of twenty-five to pursue a PhD. Hubble was now in his fourth year as a staff astronomer at Mount Wilson. He relished using the 100-inch Hooker Telescope to study his favorite subject: the fuzzy nebulae – mysterious, glowing gas clouds -- that appear scattered across the sky.

"No one fully understood these nebulae, although they were suspected to be the birthplaces of stars. The adventurous amateur astronomer William Parsons, Third Earl of Rosse, had first sketched nebulae with spiral structures that looked like faintly glowing whirlpool patterns, using his mammoth telescope in rural Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. But even nearly a century later, little more was known about them. Hubble was interested in cracking the code of nebulae, particularly spiral nebulae. His PhD work had centered on the topic. These nebulae's spiral shapes suggested that they are rotating, but otherwise they mystified Hubble and other astronomers.

"On the night of October 4, 1923, Hubble used the 100-inch Hooker Telescope to take a forty-minute exposure of one of his favorite nebulae, the Great Nebula in the Andromeda constellation. This spiral-shaped cloud was large, bright, and faintly visible to the naked eye as a fuzzy smear of light for those located away from the city lights of Los Angeles. The night had very poor 'seeing' when he took the exposure because Earth's atmosphere was relatively turbulent that night, and so the star images were not perfectly small dots. Nevertheless, Hubble's examination of the photographic plate he had made revealed a suspected nova: an exploding star. It was exciting to record such a relatively rare event inside one of the spiral nebulae.

"Hubble photographed the Andromeda nebula again the next night, hoping for a better-quality image of the suspected nova. The resulting photographic glass plate, exposed the night of October 5-6 and designated H335H, would become one of the most celebrated in all of scientific history. On it, Hubble successfully recorded the nova again. But before he could analyze it further, his periodic observing run on the 100-inch telescope ended and he had to leave to accommodate other observers. Early in the morning, he left the mountain and returned to Pasadena.

"At his office down in Pasadena, away from the mountaintop observatory, he continued studying earlier images of the Andromeda nebula region taken by others. And then he made an unusual discovery. A nova brightens dramatically and then fades into oblivion. But the star he recorded appeared on older plates, brightening and fading regularly over a period of thirty-one days. This star was not a nova, then. It had to be some other kind of star inside the Andromeda nebula.

"Suddenly, Hubble came upon the solution. He realized that he had made an image of a type of star similar to a well-known one in the constellation Cepheus. On his photographic plate H335H, he crossed out 'N,' for nova, and wrote 'VAR!,' denoting a variable star. Moreover, this star was a special type of variable that brightened and faded in a precise way. Astronomers had long studied this kind of star, which came to be known as a Cepheid variable (after a star in the constellation Cepheus), and they knew how intrinsically bright it was. By knowing how bright the star really was and measuring how bright it appeared to be in the sky, Hubble could use the star as a guidepost to gauge the distance to it.

"This was a monumental realization. Hubble calculated that, owing to the star's faint light, it must lie a million light-years away – and so must the entire nebula that surrounds it. This meant that the universe stretches across a distance at least three times larger than most astronomers then believed. With his photographic plate, Edwin Hubble had single-handedly reset the size of the cosmos.

"Hubble's discovery set off a firestorm of activity among astronomers researching other spiral nebulae. Countless observations followed, and follow-up studies rolled on for many months as bickering and soul-searching lit up the world of professional astronomy. Adding fuel to the fire was a debate staged several years earlier, in 1920, between two prominent astronomers of the day, Harlow Shapley of Princeton University and Heber Curtis of the Allegheny Observatory. Shapley believed that the Milky Way Galaxy constitutes the entire universe, while Curtis speculated that spiral nebulae are separate galaxies from the Milky Way Galaxy – essentially 'island universes.' Though not everyone would concede it yet, Hubble's discovery seemed to prove that Curtis was right.

"Hubble continued imaging Cepheid variables in other spiral nebulae, such as M33 in Triangulum, demonstrating that they, like Andromeda, are so far away that they must be distant galaxies. Hubble's observations indicated that galaxies are the basic units of stars, gas, and dust in the universe, and that they exist on a fantastic scale. He had many doubters, chief among them Shapley, but Hubble pushed on. The findings of the confident thirty-five-year-old were subsequently splashed onto the front page of the New York Times by November 1924. Egged on by supporters, he sent a paper summarizing the results to be read at the winter meeting of the American Astronomical Society, the professional organization of astronomers, on New Year's Day 1925. After the distinguished professor Henry Norris Russell of Princeton University read the paper aloud at the gathering, galaxies were on their way to becoming widely accepted. ...

"Hubble's work, building on the earlier studies of Slipher and the astronomer Milton Humason, showed that, generally speaking, all galaxies are moving away from each other over time. Hubble also found that redshifts can be used to calculate distances to galaxies.

"This research led to a monumental realization. In 1929, Hubble, with a helpful assist from the Belgian astronomer Georges Lemaitre, suggested that the new data he collected about galaxies supported the theory that if traced backward in time, the paths of all of the galaxies led to a small, dense point at which the whole universe began – a 'Big Bang' billions of years ago. This Big Bang commenced the expansion that is causing all galaxies to move apart from one another more quickly in space. The whole universe seems to be flying apart.

"Hubble analyzed forty-six galaxies and proposed what came to be known as the Hubble Constant, the rate of expansion of the cosmos. He fixed this number as 500 kilometers per second per megaparsec of space, a higher value than what we know is correct today.

"Hubble's credibility skyrocketed following the determination of an expanding universe. This was big stuff: Hubble had piled on lots of supporting evidence for the ideas of the great physicist Albert Einstein, who had proposed in the previous generation that time and space are expanding and that the cosmos is almost unimaginably large."

Comment from Martin Pollins

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Coins in the spotlight

Picture Credit: "Roman coin" by portableantiquities is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Numismatology (coin collecting) is the collecting of coins or other forms of minted legal tender (bank notes etc.), and someone who has an interest in it is called a *Numismatist*. Numismatists include collectors, specialist dealers and scholars who use coins in object-based research.

Coins of interest to collectors often include those that circulated for only a brief time, coins with mint errors and especially beautiful or historically significant pieces.

Collectors

People have hoarded coins for their bullion value for as long as coins have been minted, although the collection of coins for their artistic value has been a later development.

The Royal Mint (here) asks: *What do Hollywood star Jack Black, Louis XIV of France and the Roman Emperor Augustus have in common?* The answer is a passion for coin collecting – and they have plenty of company too. People of all ages and from all walks of life are drawn to this age-old pastime.

Coin collecting dates back to ancient Greece, when it was customary to present people with coins as gifts on special occasions. It is a popular hobby and people enjoy tracking down rare historic coins or commemorative special editions to add to their collections. Today, millions of people across the globe collect coins for fun.

Coinage History (briefly)

Coins were introduced as a method of payment around the 6th or 5th century BCE. The invention of coins is still shrouded in mystery: According to *Herdotous* (the ancient Greek historian), coins were first minted by the Lydians (these were commercial people, who were said to have customs like the Greeks and were the first people to establish permanent retail shops), while *Aristotle* claimed that the first coins were minted by *Demodike of Kyrme*, the wife of *King Midas of Phrygia* (the mythical king who was famous for his ability to change anything that he touched into solid gold).

Evidence for the earliest coins yet known from the ancient world, comes from the great temple of Artemis (in Greek religion, the goddess of wild animals, the hunt, and vegetation and of chastity and childbirth) in Ephesus (an ancient city in Turkey's Central Aegean region, near modern-day Selçuk). The first structures in the sanctuary, buried deep under the later temples, date back to the 8th century BCE, and from then on, precious objects were used in the cult or dedicated to the goddess by her worshippers.

The Lydian Lion coins were made of electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver but of variable precious metal value. The royal lion symbol stamped on the coin, similar to a seal, was a declaration of the value of the contents. These directly preceded ancient Greek coinage, through which Rome begot all Western coinage, and through which the Seleucids, Parthians, and Sassanians begot all Islamic coinage. Indian coinage has largely been a product of Greek, Roman, and Islamic influences. Chinese coinage, though it probably developed independently, was succeeded by Western-style coinage in the late 19th century. Other countries in Asia, in Africa, and elsewhere have adopted the Western approach to coinage as well.

The Lydian Lion was minted by Alyettes of Lydia, 610–560 BC (as king of Lydia, in west-central Anatolia, his conquest created the powerful but short-lived Lydian empire). However, it took some time before ancient coins were used for commerce and trade.

Some of the earliest coins were beaten at the edges to imitate the shape of a cow, in indication of their value. Most coins are circular but some were rectangular. Also a lot of coins, especially in China had a hole through the center so they could be tied on to a string.

Motivations for Collecting

The motivations for collecting vary from one person to another. Possibly the most common type of collectors are the hobbyists, who amass a collection purely for the pleasure of it with no real expectation of profit.

Another frequent reason for purchasing coins is as an investment. As with stamps, precious metals or other commodities, coin prices are periodical based on supply and demand.

A final type of collector is the inheritor, an accidental collector who acquires coins from another person as part of an inheritance. The inheritor type may not necessarily have an interest in or know anything about numismatics at the time of the acquisition.

READ MORE:

- Royal Mint - Coin Collecting: https://www.royalmint.com/discover/coin-collecting/beginners-guide-to-coin-collecting/
- Canadian Mint: https://medium.com/@CanadianMint/thinking-of-becoming-a-coin-collector-here-are-5-simple-steps-to-get-you-started-ede92e4f1387
- An introduction to coin collecting for beginners: https://www.warwickandwarwick.com/news/guides/an-introduction-to-coin-collecting-for-beginners
- History coins: https://www.historycoins.co.uk
- (Book) Whitman Guide to Coin Collecting: A Beginner's Guide to the World of Coin Collecting: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Whitman-Guide-Coin-Collecting-Beginners/dp/0794845215/

What was BRIXMIS?

Main Sources:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BRIXMIS
http://www.brixmis.co.uk/brixmis/
https://www.forces.net/news/who-were-men-cold-war-mission-brixmis

The British Commanders'-in-Chief Mission to the Soviet Forces in Germany (BRIXMIS) was a military liaison mission which operated behind the Iron Curtain in East Germany during the Cold War. These liaisons arose from reciprocal agreements formed between the Western allied nations (the US, the UK, and France) and the USSR shortly after the end of the Second World War.

Its existence spanned the period from 1946 – shortly after the end of the Second World War – until the eve of the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990.

BRISMIS was created by an agreement to exchange military missions (and the Soviet equivalent in the British Zone, SOXMIS) "*to maintain Liaison between the Staff of the two Commanders-in-Chief and their Military Governments in the Zones*".

This liaison was undertaken by 31 members – 11 officers and no more than 20 others – appointed to each mission. These liaison staff were issued passes allowing freedom of travel and circulation, with the exception of certain restricted areas, within each other's zone. Such "tours", as they became known, were conducted in uniform and in clearly identifiable vehicles. Nevertheless, although never openly stated, this liaison role also presented an ideal opportunity for the gathering of military intelligence through reconnaissance and surveillance and the occasional 'borrowing' of military matériel. This opportunity was fully exploited by both sides.

BRIXMIS was ideally placed to "test the temperature" of Soviet intentions from its privileged position behind the Iron Curtain. However, and perhaps more importantly, it offered a channel for communication between West and East via its secondary but significant role of liaison – the initial reason for its establishment.

Following the establishment of the four Allied zones of control in Germany after the Second World War, it some mechanism was clearly needed to facilitate liaison between the occupying military governments, particularly between those of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union.

The reciprocal agreement establishing the first of these, between the British and Soviet zones – called the Robertson-Malinin Agreement – was reached on 16th September 1946. Subsequent agreements in 1947 led to the exchange of similar missions between the Soviet zone and those controlled by French and US forces, although the British–Soviet arrangement was significantly larger than either of the others, with 31 individuals allowed passes in each case.

The British Mission was made up of members of the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force who conducted uniformed liaison activities in marked cars and in two Chipmunk light aircraft.

Although symbolically highly significant, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 simply returned the situation to what it had been before its erection in 1961, and the need for liaison and the gathering of intelligence was not lessened. The liaison agreements therefore remained in place until 2nd October 1990, on the eve of Germany's reunification. While BRIXMIS formally disbanded on 31 December 1990, a small number of its staff remained to conduct similar operations covertly and without the quasi-diplomatic immunity of the Robertson-Malinin Agreement during the course of the next three years.

The original BRIXMIS charter in 1946 included the following tasks:

- Repatriation of POWs, displaced persons and deserters.
- The search for war criminals and their extradition.
- Graves registration.
- Settling of border disputes.
- Anti black market operations.
- Passage of information between the Soviet and British Commanders-in-Chief.

MORE INFORMATION:

- Slideshow - Operating Behind The Iron Curtain During The Cold War: http://www.brixmis.co.uk/brixmis/
- BRIXMIS: How Did Personnel On The Cold War Mission Do Their Jobs: https://www.forces.net/news/who-were-men-cold-war-mission-brixmis
- BRIXMIS: The Cold War Mission Through The Eyes Of A British Spy: https://www.forces.net/news/brixmis-cold-war-mission-through-eyes-british-spy
- YouTube Video: https://www.forces.net/news/who-were-men-cold-war-mission-brixmis
- Forces TV Video - How British Spies Hid In Cold War East Germany: https://youtu.be/yyaNkHey_j4
- Beyond the Front Line: The Untold Exploits of Britain's Most Daring Cold War Spy Mission, Book at Amazon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Beyond-Front-Line-Exploits-Britains/dp/0002556162/

Lorry with Lego Bricks

A lorry load of Lego bricks has overturned on the motorway. Police say they don't know what to make of it.

How hot do you like your vindaloo?

It is known globally in its British Indian form as a staple of curry house and Indian restaurant menus, and is often regarded as a fiery, spicy dish. It is usually made with pork, but can be made with beef, mutton, chicken, or tofu.

Vindaloo (or *vindalho*) is an Goan cuisine curry dish based on the Portuguese dish *carne de vinha d'alhos* (literally "meat in garlic wine marinade"), which is popular in Goa, Vasai, the Konkan and other parts of India. The word *vindaloo* itself is a garbled pronunciation of the name of this popular Portuguese dish

It's loved in Britain and every India restaurant has it on its menu. But India has Portuguese explorers to thank for the famous hot curry. The dish first found its way to Goa in India through Portuguese explorers in the early 15th century, where it was adapted by the local community. It became popular further afield after British colonisation of India in the 1800s, and in Britain in the 1970s when Indian restaurants became all the rage.

In early British India cookbooks, vindaloo recipes remained close to the Goan original. The story of the vindaloo curry is as piquant as its taste. The vindaloo that is served in restaurants in Britain today differs from the original vindaloo dish; it is simply a spicier version of the standard "*medium (spiciness)*" restaurant curry with the addition of vinegar, potatoes and chili peppers.

Outside of Goa, restaurants in other parts of India prepare vindaloo with chicken or goat meat or lamb, which is sometimes mixed with cubed potatoes. Even though the word *aloo* means potato in Hindi, (as the name is a corruption of a Portuguese phrase with no Hindi etymology) traditional vindaloo does not include potatoes.

British Bangladeshi restaurants have innovated the *tindaloo*, which originated in Bangladesh and is a quite different dish to vindaloo. For a start, *tindaloo* is much hotter that vindaloo.

"Vindaloo is normally regarded as an Indian curry, but in fact is a Goan adaptation of the Portuguese dish *carne de vinha d'alhos,"* says food historian Lizzie Collingham in her book Curry: A tale of Cooks and Conquerors.

Superstitions

Picture Credit: "Happy Halloween (if a black cat lays under a ladder, does that negate all bad luck?)" by LouevilBelle is licensed under CC BY 2.0

A superstition is *"a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation"* or *"an irrational object attitude of mind toward the supernatural, nature, or God resulting from superstition."*
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superstition

The British Museum website introduces (at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/membership/events/ancient-origins-modern-superstition) the subject of superstitions, asking: *Do you touch wood for luck or avoid hotel rooms on floor thirteen? Would you cross the path of a black cat or step under a ladder? Is breaking a mirror just an expensive waste of glass or something rather more sinister?*

Despite the dominance of science in today's world, superstitious beliefs - both traditional and new - remain intact and surprisingly popular. The concept of superstition has existed for millennia, and some of today's most popular superstitions had their beginnings in ancient Babylonia.

An explanation for why we cross our fingers stems from a pagan belief that spirits could be found at 'crossings', the idea being that by simulating a crossing with one's fingers, a good spirit could be invoked to help make a wish come true.

Boudicca (or Boudica), queen of the Iceni people of Eastern England, led a major uprising against occupying Roman forces. She was said to have released rabbits onto the battlefield before a battle started so she could predict whether or not she'd be victorious. The relevance of a rabbit's foot bringing good luck is not known. Like most superstitions, it's a case of being aware of what people said and going along with it just in case it were true.

One horseshoe-related superstition says that if you sleep with a horseshoe under your pillow on New Year's Eve, you'll have good luck throughout the forthcoming year, or that if you dream of a horseshoe, it means that good luck is on the way.

Whatever you believe, here is a list of some common superstitions:

- If you have an itchy palm, good luck is coming
- If you find a penny, pick it up (for good luck)
- It's unlucky to walk under a ladder
- A black cat crossing before you can be a sign of bad luck (most of Europe considers the black cat a symbol of bad luck, particularly if one walks across the path in front of a person, which is believed to be an omen of misfortune and death) but in Britain, Ireland and Germany it is lucky to see a black cat - as long as it crosses your path from left to right
- A rabbit's foot will bring you good luck
- Finding a horseshoe means good luck
- Bad luck comes in threes
- Don't break a mirror or you'll have 7 years of bad luck
- Cross your fingers for good luck
- The number 666 equals the mark of Satan – avoid it all costs
- Knock on wood for good luck, three knocks gets rid of bad luck
- Make a wish on a wishbone
- It's unlucky to put up an umbrella inside the house
- Friday the 13th is an unlucky day
- Tossing spilled salt over your shoulder brings good luck
- Seeing magpies can be good or bad, depending on how many you see (according to the rhyme): *"One for sorrow, two for joy, three for a girl and four for a boy, five for silver, six for gold and seven for a secret never to be told, eight for a wish, nine for a kiss, ten for a bird that's best to miss.*

READ MORE:

- Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition (OUP, 1997) by Stuart A Vyse: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Believing-Magic-Superstition-Stuart-Vyse/dp/0195136349
- Superstition: A Very Short Introduction (OUP, 2020) by Stuart Vyse: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Superstition-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/0198819250/
- 55 of the Strangest Superstitions From Around the World: https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/g4489/strangest-superstitions/
- 13 Common and Silly Superstitions: https://www.livescience.com/14141-13-common-silly-superstitions.html

Researched and written by Martin Pollins

World War I Horse Heroes

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horses_in_World_War_I and https://www.thebrooke.org/get-involved/every-horse-remembered/war-horse-facts and https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/brookeusa-home-page.html

Horses were needed to perform cavalry roles, but were also vital for moving supplies, equipment, guns and ammunition. The requisition, transportation and care of these animals was therefore of huge importance. In World War 1.

Eight million horses, donkeys and mules died in the war, three-quarters of them from the extreme conditions they worked in. At the start of the war, the British Army had only 25,000 horses. Another 115,000 were purchased compulsorily under the Horse Mobilisation Scheme. The Army Remount Department also looked for help overseas, spending over £36 million (about £1.5 billion in today's money) buying animals around the world, especially from America and Canada.

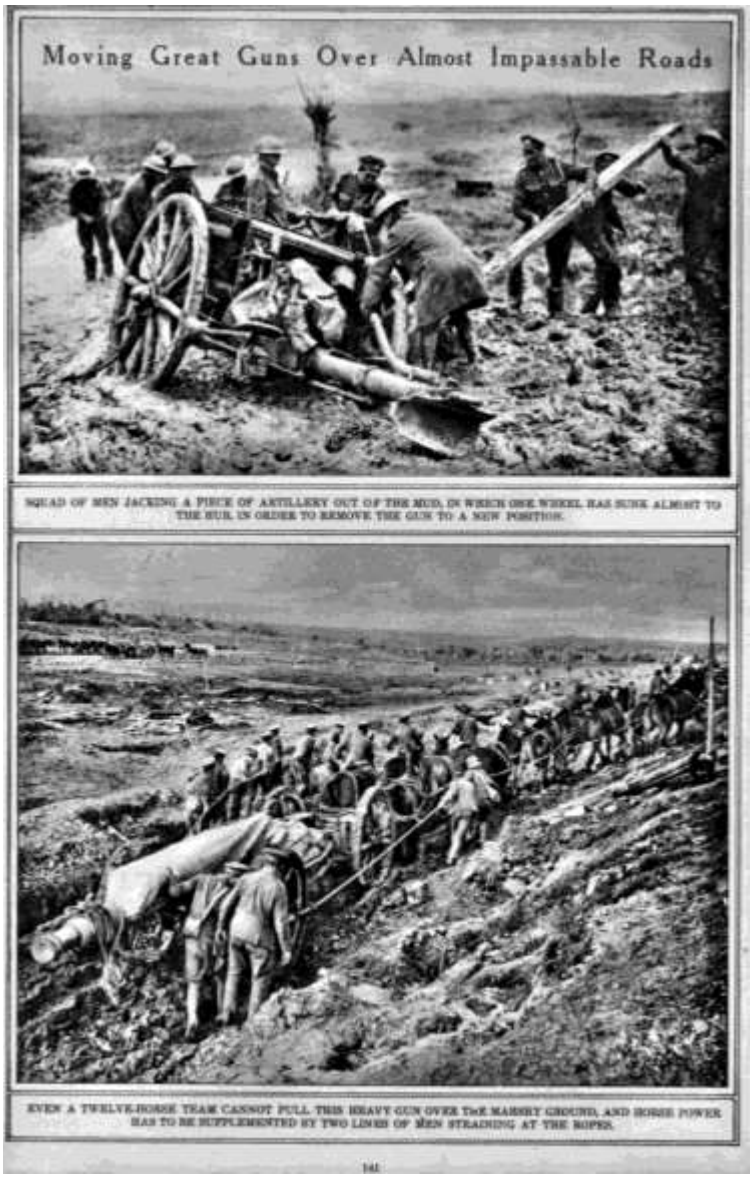
Over the course of the war, between 500 and 1,000 horses were shipped to Europe every day. Thousands of horses were put to work pulling field guns – it took from six to 12 horses to pull each gun. Britain lost over 484,000 horses during the war - one horse for every two men.

During World War I, the United States sent approximately one million horses to Europe to supply Allied forces. Few of the horses returned home when the war finished, creating a significant shortage.

The use of horses in World War I marked a transitional period in the evolution of armed conflict. Cavalry units were initially considered essential offensive elements of a military force, but over the course of the 1914-18 war, the vulnerability of horses to modern weapons such as tanks, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire greatly reduced their utility on the battlefield. While the perceived value of the horse in war changed dramatically, horses still played a significant role throughout the war.

Horses were mainly used for logistical support as they were better than motorised vehicles in travelling through deep mud and over rough terrain.

Horses were particularly good for reconnaissance and for carrying messengers well as for pulling artillery, ambulances, and supply wagons. The presence of horses often increased morale among the soldiers at the front but, on the downside, contributed to disease and poor sanitation in camps, caused by their manure and carcasses.



Picture Credit: "The War of the Nations_WW1_138" by O Suave Gigante is marked with CC0 1.0 [marked as dedicated to the public domain]

The value of horses and the increasing difficulty of replacing them were such that by 1917, some troops were told that the loss of a horse was of greater tactical concern than the loss of a human soldier.

According to the Horse Museum, horses were considered so valuable that if a soldier's horse were killed or died, the soldier was required to cut off a hoof and bring it back to his commanding officer to prove that the two had not simply become separated.

The end of the Cavalry era

The cavalry charge at Huj in Palestine in November 1917, carried out by soldiers of the Warwickshire Yeomanry and Worcestershire Yeomanry, was the last classic cavalry charge in the history of the British Army. See more detail at: https://worcesterobserver.co.uk/news/centenary-of-last-classic-british-army-cavalry-charge/

Move forward to 23rd or 24th August 1942 (there's an ongoing debate on which day it happened) during World War 11, when 600 Italian cavalrymen galloped headlong toward 2,000 Soviet foot soldiers armed with machine guns and mortars. The cavalrymen were part of the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union during World War II. They were attempting to close a gap that had opened up between the Italian and German armies along the Don River in what was the last major cavalry charge in history.

Actually no so: The last successful cavalry charge, during World War II, was executed during the Battle of Schoenfeld on 1st March 1945. The Polish cavalry, fighting on the Soviet side, overwhelmed the German artillery position and allowed for infantry and tanks to charge into the city.

By the end of World War II, horses were seldom seen in battle, but were still used extensively for the transport of troops and supplies. Today, formal battle-ready horse cavalry units have almost disappeared, although the US Army Special Forces used horses in battle during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

Have you heard this one?

Two ladies, very old and very deaf, and very crotchety, are travelling on a train.

As the train pulls into a station, one of them asks, *"Oh, is this Wembley?"*, to which the other responds, *"No, dear, this is Thursday."*

The first lady then responds, *"Oh, me too. Let's go back to the club car and have a drink."*

Water on Mars: Discovery of 3 Buried Lakes

Excerpted from: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/water-on-mars-discovery-of-three-buried-lakes-intrigues-scientists/

Researchers say they have detected a group of lakes hidden under the Red Planet's icy surface, according to an article by Jonathan O'Callaghan.

In 2018, planetary scientists reported the discovery of a large saltwater lake under the ice at Mars' south pole, a finding that was met with excitement and some scepticism. Now, researchers say they've confirmed the presence of that lake — and found three more.

The discovery, reported on 28th September 2020 in Nature Astronomy at: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41550-020-1200-6 was made using radar data from the European Space Agency's (ESA) orbiting Mars Express spacecraft.

The report says:
It follows the detection of a single subsurface lake in the same region in 2018 - which, if confirmed, would be the first body of liquid water ever detected on the red planet and a possible habitat for life. But that finding was based on just 29 observations made from 2012 to 2015, and many researchers said they needed more evidence to support the claim. The latest study used a broader data set comprising 134 observations from between 2012 and 2019.

How high is Mount Everest?

From National Geographic: Mount Everest could be higher than it was previously. Khimlal Gautam, a 35-year-old Nepali surveyor and mountaineer, climbed to the top of Mount Everest on 22nd May 2019. Gautam and his team had timed their ascent to arrive at around 3 a.m. in the pitch black, when temperatures can plummet to their most lethal, so that they could have the summit to themselves in the midst of one of the busiest climbing seasons in the mountain's storied history.

Most geographers estimate that Everest is growing at an infinitesimal half centimetre per year due to the plate tectonic collision that has been occurring for the last 40 to 50 million years as the Indian plate pushes into the Eurasian plate. But in 2015 a devastating earthquake—7.8 on the moment magnitude scale (a measure of an earthquake's magnitude based on its seismic moment) —struck the region, and ever since then geographers have been intrigued by the possibility that the mountain's height has changed by several centimetres or more, a notable amount in geologic terms. A slightly more powerful earthquake hit the region in 1934 and is believed to have lowered the mountain by nearly two feet. Additionally, there is the persistent question of whether to include the fluctuating blanket of snow and ice—which can add 10 feet or more to the mountain's elevation—or just to measure up to the highest point of rock beneath the snow and ice.

Read the full story on National Geographic at: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/09/remeasuring-mount-everest-the-worlds-tallest-mountain

How days of the week got their names

The names of the days of the week in many languages come from the names of the classical planets in Hellenistic astrology, which were in turn named after contemporary deities, a system introduced by the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity. In some other languages, the days are named after corresponding deities of the regional culture, either beginning with Sunday or with Monday. In the international standard ISO 8601, Monday is treated as the first day of the week.

Between the 1st and 3rd centuries, the Roman Empire gradually replaced the eight-day Roman nundinal cycle with the seven-day week.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_the_days_of_the_week

Up until the third century there used to be EIGHT days in a week, as the Romans worked according to the nundinal cycle. This was a period of eight days, known as market week, which culminated in the nundinae - a market day during which people would take a break from work and worship; like the modern day Sunday. The Roman Empire switched it to seven days, and this system continued into the Middle Ages and beyond.
Source: https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/3546391/days-of-the-week-names-revealed/

The Babylonians named the days after the five planetary bodies known to them (Tuesday through Saturday) and after the Sun and Moon (Sunday and Monday). This custom was later adopted by the Romans. Emperor Constantine established the seven-day week in the Roman calendar in 321 and designated Sunday and Monday as the first two days of the week. The other weekday names in English are derived from Anglo-Saxon names for gods in Teutonic mythology. Tuesday comes from Tiu, or Tiw, the Anglo-Saxon name for Tyr, the Norse god of war. Tyr was one of the sons of Odin, or Woden, the supreme deity after whom Wednesday is named. Similarly, Thursday originates from Thor, the god of thunder. Friday is derived from Frigga, the wife of Odin, representing love and beauty. Saturday comes from Saturn, the ancient Roman god of fun and feasting.
Source: https://www.almanac.com/fact/where-did-the-names-of-the-days

READ MORE:

- English Live: https://englishlive.ef.com/blog/language-lab/origins-behind-english-weekday-names/
- The Anglo-Saxon English Days of the Week (Historic UK): https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Days-Of-The-Week/
- Crowl: https://www.crowl.org/Lawrence/time/days.html
- Relatively Interesting: https://www.relativelyinteresting.com/how-days-of-the-week-got-their-name/
- Ciklopea: https://ciklopea.com/blog/translation/how-the-days-of-the-week-got-their-names/
- Dictionary.com - Where Did The Days Of The Week Get Their Names (Video): https://www.dictionary.com/e/video/days-of-the-week-names/

Tommies, Redcoats and Limeys

Tommies

The moniker is actually derived from a fictional name - *Tommy Atkins* - and is known as a slang term for British soldiers of the First and Second World Wars but it was also well established before then.

The first recorded use of the word *Tommy* with regards to British Forces was in 1743 which described the efforts of British Soldiers in a mutiny in Jamaica. It is also believed that the Duke of Wellington, during the Flanders campaign in 1794, chose the name after being inspired by the bravery of a British soldier, his name being Private Tommy Atkins.

The most likely origination of the term however, and that accepted by the Oxford English Dictionary is given as the specimen forms provided to recruits during the 19th century and onwards. Enlistment papers would be filled out with the name Tommy Atkins with sample service details.

You can see the reference everywhere from the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling to contemporary historical works like *The Last Fighting Tommy by Harry Patch*, a book available on Amazon (here).

'Tommy' is the title of an poem from 1890 by Rudyard Kipling, reprinted in his 1892 Barrack-Room Ballads*. The poem addresses the ordinary British soldier of Kipling's time in a sympathetic manner. It is written from the point of view of such a soldier, and contrasts the treatment they receive from the general public during peace-time and during war.

* The Barrack-Room Ballads are a series of songs and poems by Rudyard Kipling, dealing with the late-Victorian British Army and mostly written in a vernacular dialect. The series contains some of Kipling's most well-known work, including the poems *Gunga Din, Tommy, Mandalay,* and *Danny Deever*, helping consolidate his early fame as a poet.

Redcoats

The next most recognisable name for British fighting men is *Redcoats* for the obvious use of Red Coats in British Uniform during the 17th century. It gradually fell out of use in the early 20th century with the adoption of khaki uniform.

Limeys

Limeys is another commonly used nickname originally referring to sailors of the Royal Navy and the practice of adding lime or lemon juice to the rum ration to prevent scurvy. Limey is now widely used to refer to British people in general.

Poms and Pommies

Australians have been using the words *Poms* or *Pommies* freely since its probable emergence in the late 19th century as a nickname for English immigrants, a short form of pomegranate, perhaps referring to their ruddy complexions. Usually, a derogatory appendage such as *whingeing* is added.
Source for Redcoats and Limeys: https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/blog/2014/05/28/tommies-pommies-redcoats-and-limeys

Nursery Rhymes – what they mean

The earliest nursery rhymes seem to date from around the 14th century, although the 'golden age' came later (in the 18th century) but the roots probably go back to an earlier time. *Three Blind Mice* can be found in Thomas Ravenscroft's folk-song compilation *Deuteromelia*, dating from 1609 according to the BBC.

Baa, Baa, Black Sheep

Baa Baa Black Sheep,
Have you any wool?
Yes, sir, yes, sir,
Three bags full;
One for the master,
One for the dame,
And one for the little boy
Who lives down the lane.

This rhyme is about the *Great Custom*, a tax on wool that was introduced in 1275 by King Edward I who, after returning from the crusades. had to pay for his military adventures. A third of the price of each bag, or sack sold, was for the king (the master); one-third to the monasteries, or church (the dame); and none to the poor shepherd (*the little boy who cries/lives down the lane*). The rhyme's use of the colour *black* and the word *master* led some to wonder whether there was a racial message at its centre. The reality is that black sheep were considered bad luck because their fleeces, unable to be dyed, were less lucrative for the farmer. Until the late 16th century the final lines of the rhyme read *'And none for the little boy who cries down the lane.'* It was changed to the current version in order to cheer it up and make it into a song more suitable for children.

Goosey Goosey Gander

Goosey goosey gander,
Whither shall I wander?
Upstairs and downstairs
And in my lady's chamber.
There I met an old man
Who wouldn't say his prayers,
So I took him by his left leg
And threw him down the stairs

It's hard to imagine that any rhyme with the phrase "goosey goosey" in its title could be described as anything but feelgood. But Goosey Goosey Gander is another tale of religious persecution but from the other side: it reflects a time when Catholic priests would have to say their forbidden Latin-based prayers in secret – even in the privacy of their own home. In the original version, the narrator comes upon an old man *"who wouldn't say his prayers. So I took him by his left leg. And threw him down the stairs."*

Georgie Porgie

Georgie Porgie,
Pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry;
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away.

It is thought that the *'Georgie Porgie'* in question was actually the Prince Regent, later George IV. He was large - weighing more than 17½ stone with a waist of 50 inches (*Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie*), and was ridiculed in the popular press of the time. He had a poor reputation for his romps with the fairer sex that involved several mistresses and a string of illegitimate children. His mistresses and his wife were upset by his wanton behaviour (*kissed the girls and made them cry*). George was a great fan of bare-knuckle boxing. During one of the illegal prize-fights that George attended, a boxer was knocked out and subsequently died of his injuries. Fearing being implicated, George made a very quick exit from the scene (*when the boys came out to play, Georgie Porgie ran away*).

Jack and Jill

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after.

The origins of this rhyme aren't clear. It's possible that the rhyme is an account of King Charles I's attempt to reform the tax on liquid measures. When Parliament rejected his suggestion, he reduced the volume on half- and quarter-pints, known as jacks and gills.

There's an alternative but sad explanation: The small village of Kilmersdon in north Somerset claims to be the source of the Jack and Jill rhyme. Local legend recalls how in the late 15th century, a young unmarried couple regularly climbed a local hill to conduct their liaison in private, away from the prying eyes of the villagers. Jill fell pregnant, but just before the baby was born Jack was killed by a rock that had fallen from their 'special' hill. A few days later, Jill died whilst giving birth to their love child. Their tragic tale unfolds today on a series of inscribed stones that leads along a path to that 'special' hill.

Little Boy Blue

Little Boy Blue
Come blow your horn.
The sheep's in the meadow,
The cow's in the corn.
Where is that boy
Who looks after the sheep?
Under the haystack
Fast asleep.
Will you wake him?
Oh no, not I.
For if I do
He will surely cry.

It has been argued that Little Boy Blue was intended to represent Cardinal Wolsey, who was the son of an Ipswich butcher, who may have acted as a hayward to his father's livestock, but there is no corroborative evidence to support this assertion.

London Bridge Is Falling Down

London Bridge is falling down
Falling down, falling down
London Bridge is falling down
My fair lady
Build it up with wood and clay
Wood and clay, wood and clay
Build it up with wood and clay
My fair lady.
Etc…

This rhyme could be about a 1014 Viking attack, child sacrifice, or the deterioration of an old bridge. But the most popular theory seems to be that it deals with the depredations of London Bridge and attempts, realistic or fanciful, to repair it. It may date back to bridge rhymes and games of the Late Middle Ages, but the earliest records of the rhyme in English are from the 17th century.

Doctor Foster

Doctor Foster
Went to Gloucester
In a shower of rain
He stepped in a puddle
Right up to his middle
And never went there again.

Although first published in 1844, the origins to this rhyme may date back more than 700 years, to the time of King Edward I. Edward had several nicknames. A powerful man, over six feet tall he was often called *Longshanks*, but he was also recognised as a clever and learned man – hence the name Dr Foster but no one knows exactly why. There's a story that he arrived in Gloucester during a storm and mistaking a deep, muddy ditch for a shallow puddle, both horse and rider became trapped in the mire and had to be hauled out; infuriated, embarrassed and humiliated, he vowed never to return to the town.

Mary,Mary, Quite Contrary

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells,
With pretty maids all in a row.

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary may be about Bloody Mary, daughter of King Henry VIII and concerns the torture and murder of Protestants. The homicidal Queen Mary I (also known as Bloody Mary) was a staunch Catholic and her *garden* here is an allusion to the graveyards which were filling with Protestant martyrs. The "silver bells" were thumbscrews; while "cockleshells" are believed to be instruments of torture which were applied to male private parts.

Three Blind Mice

Three blind mice, three blind mice,
See how they run, see how they run.
They all ran after the farmer's wife
Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,
Did you ever see such a thing in your life
As three blind mice.

"Three Blind Mice" is supposedly yet another ode to Bloody Mary's reign, with the trio in question believed to be a group of Protestant bishops—Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Radley, and The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer—who (unsuccessfully) conspired to overthrow the queen and were burned at the stake for their heresy.

Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo (or Moe)

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe,
Catch a tiger by the toe.
If he hollers, let him go,
Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.

There's nothing particularly inflammatory about these words. But there is when you consider that the word "tiger" is a relatively new development in this counting rhyme, as a replacement for a no-no word. This is one of a large group of similar rhymes in which the child who is pointed to in a game by the chanter on the last syllable is either "chosen" or "counted out". The rhyme is common in many languages with similar-sounding nonsense syllables. Nobody knows its exact origin.

Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush

Here we go round the mulberry bush,
The mulberry bush,
The mulberry bush.
Here we go round the mulberry bush
On a cold and frosty morning. Etc…

"Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" is often sung as part of a children's game. According to historian R. S. Duncan, a former governor of England's Wakefield Prison, the song originated with that 420-year-old institution's female prisoners, who were exercised around a mulberry tree.

Rock-A-Bye Baby

Rock-a-bye baby on the treetop,
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock.
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
And down will come baby, cradle and all.

One interpretation of this famous lullaby is that it is about the son of King James II of England and Mary of Modena. It is widely believed that the boy was not their son at all, but a child who was brought into the birthing room and passed off as their own in order to ensure a Roman Catholic heir to the throne. The *wind* may be the Protestant forces blowing in from the Netherlands; the doomed *cradle* referring to the Royal House of Stuart. The earliest recorded version of the words in print contained the ominous footnote: *"This may serve as a warning to the Proud and Ambitious, who climb so high that they generally fall at last".*

Pop goes the Weasel

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle,
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weasel.

This popular music hall song could be heard being performed in many Victorian London theatres. One theory has its origins in the same streets as those Victorian music halls, from the packed sweatshops of Shoreditch and Spitalfields that gave Londoners their clothing. In the textile industry, a spinner's weasel is a device that is used for measuring out a length of yarn; the mechanism makes a popping sound when the correct length has been reached. The third verse of the same rhyme perhaps suggests an alternative origin, and is based upon the use of cockney rhyming slang:

Up and down the city road,
In and out the Eagle
That's the way …

To "pop" is a London slang word for pawn. Weasel can be traced to the cockney rhyming slang of "weasel and stoat", or coat. Even a very poor Victorian Londoner would have had a Sunday best coat or suit that could be pawned when times got hard (*Pop goes the weasel*), only to be retrieved on pay day. The Eagle refers to the Eagle Tavern, a pub located in Hackney.

Ring around the Roses or Ring around the Rosie

Ring-a-ring o' roses,
A pocket full of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down.

Considering that some of today's classic nursery rhymes are more than two centuries old, there are often several theories surrounding their origins—and not a lot of solid proof about which is correct. But of all the alleged nursery rhyme backstories, "Ring Around the Rosie" is probably the most infamous. Though its lyrics and even its title have gone through some changes over the years, the most popular contention is that the sing-songy verse refers to the 1665 Great Plague of London."The rosie" is the rash that covered the afflicted, the smell from which they attempted to cover up with "a pocket full of posies." The plague killed nearly 15 percent of the country's population, which makes the final verse—*"Ashes! Ashes! We all fall down"* (or A-tishoo)—rather self-explanatory.

Old Mother Hubbard

Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard,
To give the poor dog a bone:
When she came there,
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

To many, "Old Mother Hubbard" is not a mother at all—nor a woman. The poem is speculated to have been written as a mockery of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, whose refusal to grant an annulment to King Henry VIII of his marriage so that he could marry Anne Boleyn, led to his political downfall.

Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again

Humpty Dumpty was not a person at all, but a massive siege cannon that was used by Royalist forces (the king's men) during the English Civil War that raged between 1642 and 1651. During the siege of Colchester in 1648, the Royalists hauled Humpty Dumpty to the top of the church tower of St Mary-at-the-Walls, and for eleven weeks Humpty (sat on the wall and) blasted away at the attacking Parliamentarian Roundhead troops, defending the town. Humpty's great fall came when the church tower was eventually blown up by the Roundheads, and he couldn't be put together again as he had fallen into, and subsequently had become buried, deep in the surrounding marshland.

Jack Sprat

Jack Sprat could eat no fat.
His wife could eat no lean.
So betwixt them both you'll find
they licked the platter clean.

The name *Jack Sprat* was used of people of small stature in the 16th century. This rhyme was an English proverb from at least the mid-17th century. As with many nursery rhymes, Jack Sprat may have originated as a satire on a public figure: It has been suggested that Jack was King Charles I, who was left "*lean*" when parliament denied him taxation, but with his queen Henrietta Maria he was free to "lick the platter clean" after he dissolved parliament.

Five Little Monkeys

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said:
"No more monkeys jumping on the bed!"
Four little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said:
"No more monkeys jumping on the bed!"

"Five Little Monkeys" is an English language folk song and fingerplay. It is usually accompanied by a sequence of gestures that mimic the words of the song. Each successive verse sequentially counts down from the starting number.

Hey Diddle Diddle

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon
The little dog laughed to see such fun
And the dish ran away with the spoon!

The rhyme may date back to at least the 16th century but some references suggest it dates back in some form for a thousand or more years: in early medieval illuminated manuscripts, a cat playing a fiddle was a popular image.

Itsy Bitsy Spider

The itsy bitsy spider
went up the water spout.
Down came the rain,
and washed the spider out.
Up came the sun,
and dried up all the rain,
and the itsy bitsy spider
went up the spout again.

"Itsy Bitsy Spider" (also known as "Incy Wincy Spider" in Australia and Great Britain. and several other similar-sounding names), is a popular nursery rhyme and fingerplay that describes the adventures of a spider as it ascends, descends, and reascends the downspout or "waterspout" of a gutter system (or, alternatively, the spout of a teapot or open-air reservoir). It is usually accompanied by a sequence of gestures that mimic the words of the song.

Little Jack Horner

Little Jack Horner sat in the corner
Eating his Christmas pie.
He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum
And said, "What a good boy am I!"

First mentioned in the 18th century, this rhyme was associated with acts of opportunism, particularly in politics. Moralists also rewrote and expanded the poem so as to counter its celebration of greediness. The name of Jack Horner also came to be applied to a completely different and older poem on a folkloric theme; and in the 19th century it was claimed that the rhyme was originally composed in satirical reference to the dishonest actions of Thomas Horner in the Tudor period.

OTHERS NOT DETAILED HERE

- ***Ladybird, Ladybird*** is also about 16th Century Catholics in Protestant England and the priests who were burned at the stake for their beliefs.
- ***Lucy Locket*** is thought to be about a famous spat between two legendary 18th Century prostitutes.
- ***Oranges and Lemons*** follows a condemned man en route to his execution – *Here comes a chopper / To chop off your head!* – past a slew of famous London churches: St Clemens, St Martins, Old Bailey, Bow, Stepney, and Shoreditch.
- ***There was an old lady who lived in a shoe***: Debates over its meaning and origin have largely centred on attempts to match the old woman with historical female figures who have had large families, although King George II was thought to be the rhyme's subject.
- ***Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man*** is one of the earliest nursery rhyme. The oldest recorded version of the rhyme appears in Thomas d'Urfey's play The Campaigners from 1698.
- ***Little Bo-Peep*** The earliest record of this rhyme is in a manuscript of around 1805, which contains only the first verse which references the adult Bo Peep, called 'Little' because she was short and not because she was underage.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING:

- https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/55035/dark-origins-11-classic-nursery-rhymes
- https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/More-Nursery-Rhymes/
- https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150610-the-dark-side-of-nursery-rhymes
- https://allnurseryrhymes.com/old-mother-hubbard/
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_nursery_rhymes

Macadamia: Seeds not Nuts

Excerpted mostly from: https://recipes.howstuffworks.com/macadamia-nuts.htm

The macadamia is in fact a seed. And although many people think they are a native of Hawaiian agriculture and suited to its climate, macadamias are actually native to Australia.

Macadamia nuts are the fruit of the macadamia tree. They grow in clusters on trees but some processing is necessary before they can be eaten. To get to the kernel, or nut, the husk must first be removed. The kernels are then ripened and dried to achieve that characteristic crunch.

The macadamia plant is a large bushy tree that starts producing its seeds by the time it's from about 5 or 6 years old. The tree starts flowing in December through to March/April the following year. William Purvis planted the first macadamia tree on Hawaii in 1881, not initially intending for the tree nuts to be a hit; he planted the trees as windbreaks for the sugar cane fields.

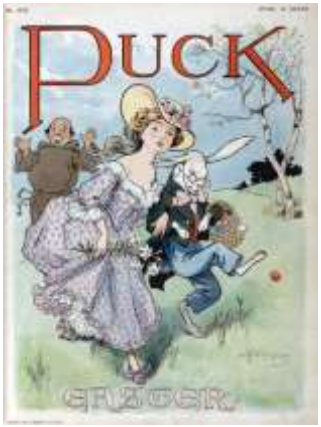
Macadamia nuts are rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre, antioxidants, and healthy fats. Their potential benefits include weight loss, improved gut health, and protection against diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and heart disease.

Macadamia nuts are now the most expensive nuts in the world – even though they aren't nuts at all.

WATCH A VIDEO
https://youtu.be/SjRWDT6mY8I

Pulchritudinous

You might well ask – what on earth is that? Well, for starters, it's an adjective. It means *physically beautiful.*



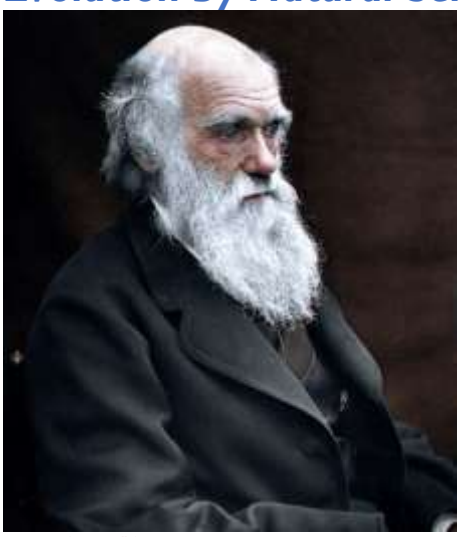
More interesting is its origin: it made its appearance in 1877 in *Puck*, the first successful American humour magazine. The word *Pulchritudinous* is formed from the Latin noun *Pulchritūdō* ("beauty") and the adjective suffix *–ous.*

The Common Garden Snail

Cornu aspersum, or just known as the common garden snail, is a species of land snail. In technical terms, it is a terrestrial pulmonate gastropod mollusc in the family Helicidae, which includes some of the most familiar land snails. Of all terrestrial molluscs, this species (as shown above) may well be the most widely known.

What is not widely known is that a snail has more teeth than any other animal – the 'shredder' hidden in their mouth can have as many as 25,000 teeth.

Evolution by Natural Selection



Naturalist Charles Robert Darwin, then aged only 27, returned to England in September 1836 after a five-year journey on HMS Beagle (a Cherokee-class 10-gun brig-sloop of the Royal Navy, constructed at a cost of £7,803).

Darwin had gathered specimens and made copious observations that led to his theory of *evolution by natural selection*. That theory, not published until 1959, became the basis of modern evolutionary studies.

His proposition that all species of life have descended over time from common ancestors is now widely accepted, and considered a foundational concept in science but it was not always so. At first, Darwin's ideas shocked the religious Victorian society by suggesting that animals and humans shared a common ancestry but, over time, his non-religious biology appealed to the rising class of professional scientists, and by the time of his death evolutionary imagery had spread through all of science, literature, and politics. In 1859, more than two decades after returning from his journey, his book *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection* was published.

On his death, Darwin, himself an agnostic, was accorded the ultimate British accolade of burial in Westminster Abbey, London.

LEARN MORE:

- Learn about the life of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution, at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Darwin
- Charles Darwin: Evolution and the story of our species – BBC Teach: https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/charles-darwin-evolution-and-the-story-of-our-species/z7rvxyc
- Biography.com: https://www.biography.com/scientist/charles-darwin
- Smithsonian Magazine: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-evolution-of-charles-darwin-110234034/
- National Geographic: https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/charles-darwin/
- Darwin's Book at Amazon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Origin-Species-Everymans-Library-classics/dp/1857152581/

The Court of Requests

Picture Credit: [Cropped] "The Court of Requests - Church Street, Oldbury - plaque" by ell brown is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

You may not have come across *The Court of Requests* before now and so here is some information about it.

From Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_Requests
The Court was a minor equity court in England and Wales. The court was instituted by King Richard III in his 1484 parliament. It first became a formal tribunal with some Privy Council elements under Henry VII, hearing cases from the poor and from the servants of the King. It quickly became popular on account of the low cost of bringing a case and the rapid processing time, earning the disapproval of the common law judges.

Two formal judges, called the "*Masters of Requests Ordinary*", were appointed towards the end of Henry VIII's reign, with an additional two "*Masters of Requests Extraordinary*" appointed under Elizabeth I to allow two judges to accompany her on her travels around England.

Two more ordinary masters were appointed under James I of England, with the increasing volume of cases bringing a wave of complaints as the court's business and backlog grew.

Another Court of Requests came about by Act of the Common Council of the City of London on 1st February 1518. It had jurisdiction over small debts under 40 shillings between citizens and tradesmen of the City of London. The judges of the court were two aldermen and four ancient discreet commoners. It was also called the Court of Conscience in the Guild Hall, where it met.

The court became embroiled in a dispute with the common law courts during the late 16th century, who were angry at the amount of business deserting them for the Court of Requests. During the 1590s they went on the offensive, overwriting many decisions made by the Court of Requests and preventing them from imprisoning anyone. It is commonly accepted that this was a death-blow for the court, which, as it was dependent on the Privy Seal for authority, died when the English Civil War made the seal invalid.

From the National Archives
Source: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/court-of-requests-records-1485-1642/

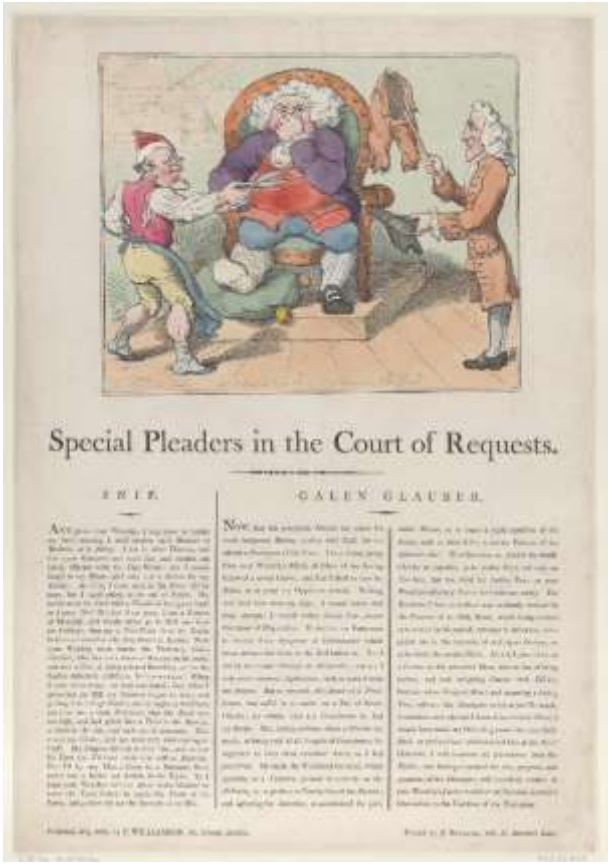
The Court of Requests was established in 1483 [not 1484 as stated in Wikipedia] to provide easy access for poor men and women to Royal justice and equity. Its cheap and simple procedure attracted many suitors, not all of them poor but a significant number of them were women.

An offshoot of the King's Council, the court was set up when the Chancery official responsible for sorting petitions from the poor became clerk of the Council of Requests. It was attacked by the common law courts whose lawyers resented the loss of business they endured as a result of its popularity.

Cases heard by the court followed the same procedure as was used in the Court of Chancery. Most cases were either settled out of court or were abandoned because of the cost of litigation. However, for some cases the court would pass judgement called a *Decree or Final Order*. There are records of these and other orders issued by the court, in both Latin and English.

Initially, judges of the court were Royal Councillors, under the authority of the King's Almoner and the Dean of the Chapel Royal. After 1519, when the court began to meet regularly in the Whitehall at Westminster, the Lord Privy Seal, assisted by Masters and (after 1562), Extraordinary Masters of Requests, headed the court, specifically to determine poor men's causes by equitable means. Local commissions often dealt with much of the business of the court after the defendant's answer was filed, and Masters of Requests based their decrees, orders and judgements on returned commissioners' reports.

The records of the court cease in 1642. Although the court was never formally abolished, much of its caseload eventually passed to local small claims courts.



Picture Credit: "File:Special Pleaders in the Court of Requests Met DP884696.jpg" by Thomas Rowlandson is marked with CC0 1.0

READ MORE:

- IS Leadam, Select cases in the Court of Requests (Selden Society, XII, 1898)
- Sir Julius Caesar, The ancient state, authority and proceedings of the Court of Requests, ed, LM Hill (London, 1975)
- Tim Stretton (ed), Marital litigation in the Court of Requests 1542-1642, Camden Fifth Series volume 32 (London, Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2008)

When you get stung by a bee – this is what happens

Exerpted from article by
Ashley Moor at: https://bestlifeonline.com/bee-sting/

If you've ever been stung by a bee, the chances you will certainly recall the nasty side effects that followed the sting: the pain, redness, and swelling at the site of the sting - Ouch! When we get a bee sting, our immune systems provide an impressive line of defence against the bee's venom - and in most cases, we recover.

This is what happens when you are stung:

Bee venom spreads immediately and quickly: Because a bee's venom is water-soluble (it dissolves in water), it's bad news for humans as 60% of the human body is made of water, which means the venom spreads quickly.

The body's white blood cells fight back: After a bee sting, your body's first line of defence comes in the form of white blood cells that arrive to fight off antigens in the bee's venom. As to the attack to your body, redness, swelling, heat, and pain may occur at the site of the sting. Nasty.

The bee releases melittin into your body, which stimulates pain receptors: The bee releases a chemical called melittin into your body. Melittin is *cytotoxic* (it destroys red blood cells immediately upon entering the body by breaking up their membrane). It also stimulates your body's pain receptors. Very unpleasant!

Your body releases histamine, causing swelling: To help your immune system fight the spreading of venom, melittin triggers your body to produce histamine, which helps your body fight off an infection, and it's also what causes the swelling.

Your blood pressure drops: With the bursting of the red blood cells at the site of the sting comes the eventual expansion of your blood vessels. This subsequently can cause your blood pressure to drop significantly.

Your nerve tissue is damaged: Three percent of bee venom is comprised of the protein *apamin*, which, when injected into your body, destroys nerve tissue. Nasty!

Your kidneys work overtime: Once a bee's venom damages the cell tissue in the body, it's the kidney's job to eliminate this damaged tissue in order to keep the body healthy and ready to face further traumas. The only time that the kidneys may be damaged from a bee sting is when the person affected is stung multiple times.

Your heart and adrenal glands are stimulated: The proteins present in bee venom, including *apamin* and *melittin*, stimulate the heart and adrenal glands to work harder in order to push the infection out of your body. In turn, this can cause your pulse to speed up. The proteins also cause the adrenal glands to produce *cortisol* (the hormone most commonly associated with stress) in order to protect the body from further infection.

Your immune system can overreact: In the most serious and rare bee sting cases, the immune system can overreact to the sting, causing a life-threatening allergic response called Anaphylaxis. Symptoms range from minor inconveniences (such as itching) to severe issues (such as loss of consciousness). But it's not quite over yet…

Though delayed responses to bee stings are incredibly rare, they usually occur in those with a weak immune system, as the body's defences are not able to coordinate a proper response to the sting. While symptoms of this delayed response vary, they range from inflammation of the brain, nerves, blood vessels, and kidneys, to the possibility of a serum sickness which can cause a rash, fever, or joint pain.

Vintage Peter Cook and Dudley Moore

Here's their Tarzan Audition sketch (the picture is a screenprint from the video)

Click this link for the video:
https://youtu.be/njK6zQp2Fdk

3-D printing – think of the possibilities

What is 3-D Printing?

A good place to start, is to understand what 3-D printing does. It's a manufacturing process (also called '*additive manufacturing*') that creates a three dimensional object by incrementally (meaning 'layer by layer') adding material (such as plastic, metal, ceramics, powders, liquids, or even living cells) until the object required is complete.

If that's difficult to take in, take a look at a few of the thousands of videos that are available online: simply Google '*3-D printing videos*'.

The trouble is that technology is moving so fast that even understanding 3-D printing isn't enough. Rather than building objects layer by layer, the latest printers can create whole structures by projecting light into a resin that solidifies.

The possibililities

What if doctors could insert a 3-D printer into a patient's body? That might be good, wouldn't it?

Researchers have developed a tiny 3-D printing robot that fits on the end of an endoscope, a tool that snakes down the throat into the stomach [or perhaps the other end]. Their work demonstrates that bioprinting within the body has the potential to heal stomach ulcers, while other studies suggest it could also treat hernias and infertility.

Scientific American published an article on this subject (at: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/3-d-printing-inside-the-body-could-patch-stomach-ulcers/. It said:

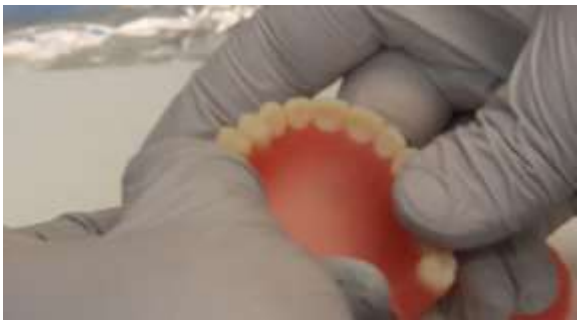
> *Just as 3-D printers set down layers of material to create structures, bioprinters extrude living cells to produce tissues and organs. A long-term dream for this concept is that people on active waiting lists for organ donations—nearly 70,000 individuals in the U.S. alone, according to the nonprofit United Network for Organ Sharing—might one day have the option of getting a bioprinted organ. Although the ability to produce a functional heart or kidney this way likely lies years in the future, realistic near-term goals include bioprinting simpler structures, such as bone grafts. Living tissues printed outside the body, however, would still require implantation surgery, which often involves large incisions that increase the risk of infection and lengthen recovery times.*

In May 2020, Jamie Bell wrote an article at: https://www.nsmedicaldevices.com/analysis/3d-printing-medical-equipment/ His article focused on five types of medical device that are already being produced using 3D printing. Here's an extract of what he wrote about pioneering surgery on conjoined twins:

> *Across the world, 3D printing has been called upon to ease shortages of vital medical equipment such as personal protective equipment and ventilators caused by the Covid-19 outbreak — highlighting its value as an alternative to traditional manufacturing methods.*
>
> *Over four months in 2018 and 2019, Safa and Marwa Ullah — twins joined at the top of the head — were separated following a pioneering surgical procedure at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in the UK.*
>
> *This feat, which involved more than 50 hours of surgery and three separate major operations, would almost certainly not have been possible without the combined use of additive manufacturing and virtual reality (VR) technologies.*
>
> *The 100-strong team of doctors that helped separate the twins used 3D-printed plastic models of their brains, skulls and blood vessels to practice the procedures, as well as for building cutting guides, before performing the surgery for real.*

Following the final procedure, Dr Owase Jeelani, the paediatric neurosurgeon who led the team, told the BBC "*this is clearly the way of the future*".

Dentures



Picture Credit: Screenshot from video at: https://youtu.be/PMZtnWnn_6k

Modern dentures are made from acrylic resin and other plastics. 3-D printed digital dentures are a major step toward the overall simplification of the dental laboratory manufacturing process. 3-D printed dentures consist of different parts for the teeth and gingiva (basically the gums), printed separately and brought together in post-processing. Crowns, bridges, implants and denture bases can be already made by 3-D printers.

Buying a 3-D printer

Buying a 3-D printer isn't expensive (£200 upwards on Amazon) but the choice available is bewildering. It's hard to decide what you want when you don't know what it can do.

Picture Credit: "self driving car meme" by rjk9601 is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

The Metropolitan Police

Excerpted from various sources including:
- https://www.amdigital.co.uk/about/blog/item/bobbies-and-peelers
- http://www.history.co.uk/history-of-london/formation-of-the-metropolitan-police

Picture Credit: "A Safe Escort" by Leonard Bentley is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

The Metropolitan Police Service, formerly and still commonly known as the Metropolitan Police and informally as the Met, Scotland Yard, or the Yard, is the territorial police force responsible for law enforcement in the Metropolitan Police District, which currently consists of the 32 London boroughs.

History

In the mid-18th century, the novelist and playwright Henry Fielding had put together the *Bow Street Runners*. In 1798, river police were introduced to combat the rising crime that accompanied the growing merchanting trade on the Thames. And there were local parish police and watchmen who were (trying to) keep the peace too.

On 29th September 1829 the first units of the London Metropolitan Police appeared on the streets of London, under Sir Robert Peel. Following his appointment as Home Secretary 7 years before, Peel set to work laying the legislation in place that would create the very first English police force.

Peel modelled his 'New Police' force on the river police. His force consisted of 17 divisions, each with 4 inspectors and 144 constables, and policed a population of less than two million.

By the end of the century, there were nearly 16,000 police in London serving a population of over seven million. They were based at 4 Whitehall Place and took up neighbouring buildings as it grew. It soon became synonymous with a nearby street, Great Scotland Yard, which of course gave name to the Metropolitan Police HQ we know today.

The police force itself became known after its founder as the 'bobbies' and 'peelers'.

Whilst *Fielding's Runners* relied mainly on rewards from courts and victims for their income, Peel's police received regular pay.

Uniform

The History.co.uk website describes the uniform etc of a policeman:

A Peeler's uniform was a strange mix. As 'servants' of the people, they wore tailcoats, which were a non-military blue. But because they needed an air of authority, they wore top hats, strengthened with an iron ring at the crown. These were replaced in the 1850s by helmets, which were more practical but still visible. The 'stock' around their neck was stiff, to guard against garrotting. And from a heavy leather belt hung handcuffs, a wooden truncheon and a cutlass in a scabbard. They also carried a rattle - changed for a whistle in the 1880s - to summon help. Inspectors were issued with a pistol.

PC Plod

Policemen 'on the beat' had to walk a regular route at a steady pace of around 2.5 miles an hour, earning yet another nickname: PC Plod.

Size

As of September 2019, the Metroplitan Police had 41,399 full-time personnel. This included 30,940 police officers, 8,472 police staff, 1,273 police community support officers and 714 designated officers. This number excludes the 1,838 special constables, who work voluntarily part-time (a minimum of 16 hours a month) and who have the same powers and uniform as their regular colleagues. This makes the Metropolitan Police, in terms of officer numbers, the largest police force in the United Kingdom by a significant margin, and one of the biggest in the world.

City Police

Despite the success of the Metropolitan Police, a separate police force was established in the City and enshrined in law in 1839. This force still polices the Square Mile today. City Police can be distinguished by different markings on their caps and buttons.

River Police

London's river police were merged with the Metropolitan Police in 1839 but still operate from the site of their original headquarters in Wapping.

The Caspian Sea Monster

Picture Credit: "caspian sea monster" by Adam Lindquist is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

The KM (Korabl Maket) (literally "Ship-prototype"), known colloquially as the *Caspian Sea Monster*, was an experimental ground effect vehicle (ekranoplan) developed in the Soviet Union in the 1960s by the Central Hydrofoil Design Bureau.

It was developed from 1964 to 1966, during a time when the Soviet Union saw interest in ground effect vehicles—airplane-like vehicles that use ground effect to fly several meters above surfaces, primarily bodies of water (such as the Caspian Sea).

Technically it was an aircraft. It was considered by the authorities to be closer to a boat and was assigned to the Soviet Navy, but operated by test pilots of the Soviet Air Forces. It was part plane, part boat that could fly just above the sea surface and carry huge loads of personnel or weapons at high speed.

The KM began operation in 1966, and was continuously tested by the Soviet Navy until 1980, when it was damaged in a testing accident and sank in the Caspian Sea.

The KM was the largest and heaviest aircraft in the world from 1966 to 1988, and its surprise discovery by the United States and the subsequent attempts to determine its purpose became a distinctive event of espionage during the Cold War.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspian_Sea_Monster

READ MORE:

- Soviet-Era 'Sea Monster' Stranded in Caspian Sea During Tow Effort: https://www.extremetech.com/extreme/314349-soviet-era-sea-monster-stranded-in-caspian-sea-during-tow-effort
- Boat or plane? The Caspian Sea Monster and next-gen hybrids: https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/caspian-sea-monster-ekranoplan-ground-effect-vehicle/index.html

SEE THE VIDEOS

- What happened to the Ekranoplan? - The Caspian Sea Monster: https://youtu.be/x22nVFTd8nI
- Unnamed: https://youtu.be/R3mvLR9qb20

Typhoon class submarines

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhoon-class_submarine

The Typhoon class, Soviet designation Project 941 (NATO reporting name Typhoon) is a class of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines designed and built by the Soviet Union for the Soviet Navy. With a submerged displacement of 48,000 tonnes, the Typhoons are the largest submarines ever built, able to accommodate comfortable living facilities for the crew of 160 when submerged for months on end. The source of the NATO reporting name remains unclear, although it is often claimed to be related to the use of the word "typhoon" by General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev of the Communist Party in a 1974 speech while describing a new type of nuclear ballistic missile submarine, as a reaction to the US Navy's new Ohio-class submarine at the time.

Typhoon-class submarines feature multiple pressure hulls, similar to the World War II Japanese I-400-class submarine, simplifying internal design while making the vessel much wider than a normal submarine.

The Russian Navy cancelled its Typhoon modernisation programme in March 2012 for cost reasons. With the decommissioning and scrapping of her Typhoon sister boats (TK-202, TK-13, Simbirsk, Arkhangelsk, Severstal, and TK-210), Dmitriy Donskoy (TK-208) is the largest submarine in the world in active service (picture Credit: "Russian submarine Dmitriy Donskoi (TK-208) in Kronshtadt. ПЛАРБ 'Дмитрий Донской' в Кронштадте." by Peer.Gynt is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0):

Soaring up mountains to save lives

Story picked up at: https://futurism.com/the-byte/paramedics-test-jetpack-daring-rescue

Picture Credit: Screenshot from BBC Video (see link below)

The BBC has reported that *The Great North Air Ambulance Service**, is testing a jetpack made by Gravity Industries to one day allow paramedics to fly up a mountain to provide first aid.

A jetpack could allow paramedics to soar up the mountain in 90 seconds rather than hiking for 30 minutes, according to GNAAS director of operations Andy Mawson: *"In a jet pack, what might have taken up to an hour to reach the patient may only take a few minutes, and that could mean the difference between life and death,"* he told the *BBC*.

Gravity Industries, led by founder and daredevil Richard Browning, has made headlines over the last couple of years for completing several flights inside an "Iron Man-style" suit and even setting speed records. The suit has two mini engines on each arm and one on the back.

Browning completed a demonstration exercise in the UK's Lake District as part of the collaboration. *"If the idea takes off, the flying paramedic will be armed with a medical kit, with strong pain relief for walkers who may have suffered fractures, and a defibrillator for those who may have suffered a heart attack,"* GNAAS' Mawson told the *BBC*.

* *The Great North Air Ambulance Service* is a registered charity based in the United Kingdom. It operates a dedicated helicopter emergency service for the North of England with three aircraft, serving North Yorkshire, the North-East, Cumbria and Scottish borders

READ MORE:
Jet suit paramedic tested in the Lake District 'could save lives' [*BBC*]

SEE VIDEO:
View BBC video online at:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-54331994

The Berlin spy tunnel

Extracts from: http://www.alliiertenmuseum.de/en/collection/object-in-focus/the-berlin-spy-tunnel.html

The Berlin spy tunnel represents one of the most fascinating intelligence operations of the early Cold War period. From 1953 to 1955, the American CIA and the British SIS collaborated in planning and constructing a secret tunnel with the aim of tapping Soviet military communications. With a length of approximately 430 metres, it ran from the Rudow district in Berlin's American sector to Altglienicke in the Soviet sector. Between May 1955 and April 1956, the Americans and British tapped into more than 400,000 Soviet Army telephone conversations and a large volume of telegraph communications.

After its discovery by a special communications unit of the Soviet Armed Forces in April 1956, the Berlin spy tunnel caused a stir internationally. In autumn 1956, the tunnel (circa 300-metres-long) segment on East Berlin territory was removed. The remaining segments on the West Berlin side were forgotten. That changed in 1997, when the Allied Museum had a ca. seven-meter-long section of the "walking gallery" (Laufstollen) excavated and removed for restoration and exhibition. There was no information on the whereabouts of the GDR tunnel segment— until 2012.

Now, 56 years after its discovery, the intriguing history of the Berlin spy tunnel has been expanded to include the fascinating episode of its "reuse" in the GDR. Only now can the story be told in its entirety as a chapter of the Cold War. The Allied Museum is the only institution in the world to possess original segments of the tunnel, one of which can be seen in the permanent exhibition. It is one of the absolute highlights for visitors.

The Allied Museum
The Allied Museum (German: *AlliiertenMuseum*) is a museum in Berlin. It documents the political history and the military commitments and roles of the Western Allies (US, France and Britain) in Germany – particularly Berlin – between 1945 and 1994 and their contribution to liberty in Berlin during the Cold War era.

Photo Credit: By A. Savin (Wikimedia Commons · WikiPhotoSpace) - Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=58308698

READ MORE:
- Alliiertен Museum website: http://www.alliiertenmuseum.de/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibition/highlights.html

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust

Sources and Further Reading:
https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-community/places-to-visit-and-explore/wey-and-arun-canal/
https://weyarun.org.uk/
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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wey_and_Arun_Canal
https://wikishire.co.uk/wiki/Wey_and_Arun_Canal
https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/17496536.canal-revival-sussex-something-savoured/

Members of the Haywards Heath & District Probus Club and others were treated to a splendid and interesting talk via Zoom given by Ian Ellis on 9th June 2021. The talk was about the work of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust in maintaining the canal and the recent developments on it.

Introduction

Around two hundred years ago, canals were the main arteries of Britain for transporting goods. They were slow but faster than taking heavy objects by cart along muddy tracks. They were quiet and economical to use. Their heyday was early in the 19th century before the 1840s when railways burst on the scene, but eventually it was the railways that finally sounded the death knell for most canals.

The river Wey was made navigable from Weybridge to Guildford in 1653 and extended to Godalming 90 years later. The Arun has existed as a tidal navigation as far inland as Pallingham Quay, near Pulborough, since 1575.

The 23-mile Wey & Arun Canal - comprising of the combined Arun Navigation and the Wey & Arun Junction Canal - was once the national inland waterway network's only connection to the English Channel. Now known as *'London's lost route to the sea'*, in the 19th century it was a safe route from London to ports such as Portsmouth, at times when ships, following the South coast, were at risk from attack by the French navy.

In the 19th century, you could meander by boat from London to Littlehampton on the south coast of England via Weybridge, Guildford, Pulborough and Arundel. This was just part of a once-extensive system of inland waterways covering England and Wales. The route was via the rivers Wey and Arun, linked between Shalford in Surrey, and Pallingham in Sussex, by the 23-mile Wey & Arun Canal. Although it was only one part of an extensive system, the *Wey & Arun Canal* formed a vital link, the only one between the south coast and the Thames, linking London and the busy river Thames with the English Channel - and beyond.

What are Canals?

Canals are waterways channels, or artificial waterways, for water conveyance, or to service water transport vehicles. They may also help with irrigation. In a way, you can think of a canal as being an artificial version of a river. In most cases, a canal will have a series of dams and locks that create reservoirs of low-speed current flow. A canal is also known as a *Navigation* when it runs parallel to a river and shares part of its waters and drainage basin and leverages its resources by building dams and locks to increase and lengthen its stretches of slack water levels while staying in its valley.

Quick Timeline

- The first scheme to link the Wey and the Arun was proposed in 1641. Headwaters of the rivers were 2 miles apart, and a canal to bridge them down to a navigable upper reach was submitted as a bill to Parliament but was dropped at the committee stage.
- Another scheme, to tie in the Adur and Mole was suggested in 1663 but was not pursued.
- In 1810, the 3rd Earl of Egremont began to promote the idea of a canal to link the Wey and Arun.
- A survey was carried out in 1811 by Francis and Netlam Giles for an alternative, 37 miles long canal, from the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Railway at Merstham to Newbridge, via Three Bridges, Crawley and Horsham. A petition was presented to Parliament, but the scheme went no further.
- An Act of Parliament received Royal Assent on 19th April 1813, for making and maintaining a navigable canal, to unite the Rivers Wey and Arun. It authorised the construction of a canal from the Godalming Navigation (an extension of the River Wey) near Shalford, south of Guildford to the northern terminus of the Arun Navigation at Newbridge. The canal was 18.5 miles long, had 23 locks and was suitable for 30-ton barges. Construction was completed in September 1816.
- The canal was never very prosperous but did reasonably well. However, the opening of the Guildford and Horsham Railway, was just too much competition for the canal. There were also engineering problems with only a few sources of water to tap into, compounded by porous subsoils at summit level, which led to water shortages. Although the canal was offered for sale in 1870, it was officially abandoned in 1871, with the land sold to many along its route. The canal company was wound up in 1910.

Although known today as the *Wey & Arun Canal*, it actually consists of two canals:

- The first was the *Arun Navigation*, which gave trading vessels from the south coast access to Newbridge Wharf near Billingshurst and was opened in 1787.
- In 1813, an Act of Parliament, backed by the 3rd Earl of Egremont of Petworth House, authorised the building of a further canal, the *Wey & Arun Junction Canal* which extended the navigation from Newbridge up to Stonebridge Wharf south of Guildford on the Godalming portion of the river Wey.

The River Arun was used in an unimproved condition for centuries, but work was carried out on the river itself and the port of Arundel in the 16th century, which allowed boats to reach Pallingham Quay against the north of the parish of Pulborough by 1575.

Started in 1816 and closed in 1871

In 1816, the *Wey & Arun Junction Canal* opened to great fanfare, linking the Wey Navigation (near Guildford) to the south coast via the Arun Navigation. Conceived during the Napoleonic Wars, the canal was intended to provide a safe, efficient route from London to Portsmouth to carry goods supplying the dockyards as well as gunpowder and heavy munitions such as cannons (see here). Many of the River Arun meanders were canalised south of Pulborough to shorten the route for barges from Amberley carrying lime from the chalk pits down to the coastal towns for their construction. In its heyday, the canal carried many tons of cargo but the end of the war with France, and the arrival of the railways, sounded the death knell for the *Wey & Arun Junction Canal* as a business, and by 1871 it was formally closed.

Following the Industrial Revolution, commercial trade on the canal gradually increased, with 23,000 tons carried at its peak in 1839. However, the railways were becoming established as the new form of transport. When they first arrived in Sussex, the railways had little impact. The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway between London and Portsmouth passed through Pulborough and Amberley (see: http://lbscr.org/). In 1865, the railway line between Guildford and Horsham opened in direct competition with the canal. Although carrying charges were cheaper, the canal could not compete with the railway for speed and convenience. By 1868 canal traffic had virtually ceased, and in 1871 this caused an Act of Abandonment to be passed. By this time, parts of the canal were almost derelict although occasional traffic carried on after official closure.

Further south, the Arun Navigation managed to survive until the start of the 20th century before it also succumbed to the elements and the ravages of neglect. On abandonment, the canal was sold off, mostly to the estates from which the land had originally been taken, but, in many cases, there is no record of resale. Although neglected, in the few places where it is close to civilisation, it was still regarded as a feature of local interest – for example, Rowner Lock near Billingshurst is shown on local postcards in the early 1900s despite it having been disused for over 30 years.

For most of its length, however, the canal remained no more than a stagnant, muddy, and overgrown depression in the ground. And that is how it remained so for almost a century, unloved and largely forgotten - that is, until 1970 when a group of enthusiasts formed the Wey & Arun Canal Society, which later became the *Wey & Arun Canal Trust*.

One of the main reasons the canal failed was due to the lack of water. The same problem exists today and some of the restored locks need water to be pumped up stream which is very expensive. One of the main benefits of restoration is the amenity value as a wildlife corridor and tow-path use by walkers and cyclists as well as dog walkers etc.

Rebirth

Canal travel reached its low point after the Second World War. But since then, there has been a steady growth of interest. There are about 3,000 miles of navigable canal in England and another 2,500 which could be restored. Many people take canal boat holidays, enjoying the slow and steady progress around the backs of houses and factories to reach open countryside. This interest has been heightened in recent years by actors Timothy West and Prunella Scales starring in a TV series about their favourite hobby.

Interest in the Wey & Arun Canal was sparked by the publication in 1965 of a book by P.A.L. Vine (*London's Lost Route to the Sea*). As a result, the Daily Telegraph weekend magazine carried a 5-page article about the Wey & Arun Canal.

In 1968, a local group of enthusiasts became interested in the canal, and having carried out some research into its history, formed the Wey & Arun Canal Society in 1970, with a view to reopening the canal. The Society evolved into The Wey & Arun Canal Trust in 1973 (a private company limited by guarantee with no share capital, and the present custodians of the canal restoration).

In 1990, the restoration was identified by the Inland Waterways Association's Restoration Committee as one of those where significant progress was being made, and which would benefit from the backing of the Association. The Waterway Recovery Group, which gave active support to restoration schemes, developed a strategy of "a guaranteed labour force for guaranteed work" in 1992, which ensured that local societies would have the funding and relevant planning permission in place before a group of volunteers arrived to carry out the work. The Wey & Arun Canal was one of three schemes where working parties were run in this way. The practical outworking of this approach was demonstrated in the following year, when a section of the canal at Billingshurst was cleared, and three accommodation bridges were rebuilt by a working party of 250 people, as part of a Waterway Recovery Group initiative called "Dig Deep".

The Trust and its work

Restoration of the waterway started in 1971, initially by the *Wey & Arun Canal Society* and then the *Wey & Arun Canal Trust.* The Trust aims to restore the canal back to life, from the River Wey at Shalford to the River Arun at Pallingham, near Pulborough in West Sussex. Since then, restoration by the Trust has led to several miles being restored to the standard navigable by narrowboats and small tour barges. Work is continuing, with the ultimate aim of reopening the entire canal to navigation.

The Trust has reached agreements with several landowners to allow restoration work to be undertaken over half the length of the 23-mile canal. By 2009, twenty-four bridges had been reconstructed, eleven locks restored, two aqueducts re-instated, and several miles of canal bed cleared and dredged.

Thanks to the work of the Trust and its volunteers, many miles of towpath are now available for walkers, cyclists and riders, with free routes available to download at the Trust's website. As part of its aim to create a 23-mile 'green corridor' through the West Sussex and Surrey countryside, the Trust has also created Hunt Nature Park at Shalford, a wetland wildlife area leased from Surrey County Council - for wildlife enthusiasts, the Park and its viewing platform is a must visit.

Picture Credit: "Wey & Arun Canal" by Dumphasizer is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Today, more than 200 years after it opened, over 3,000 members and volunteers are working hard to reopen the Wey & Arun Canal for leisure. Already several miles of the Canal are in regular use by small boats, canoes, and the Trust's own trip boats.

One of the major projects has been the building of the B2133 Loxwood High Street Bridge and the new Loxwood Lock, costing approximately £2 million.

The first fully navigable section of the canal in Surrey, which is part of the Summit Level between Dunsfold and Alfold, was officially opened by actress and Surrey Hills patron Dame Penelope Keith, in early October 2016. In a project costing around £700,000, a new Compass Bridge was also opened at the same time at the Alfold entrance to Dunsfold Aerodrome. It replaced a 1930s concrete causeway which was blocking the waterway.

Boats cruise along the idyllic Loxwood Link section of the canal on the Surrey/West Sussex border. Public trips run every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday from April until October, except Easter Sunday and Easter Monday. The Trust also runs special cruises in the evenings as well as children's events.

So far, most of the money used to restore the canal has come from donations, fundraising activities, and legacies.

More information on the Trust

A photo-history of the canal's restoration to date and the latest progress reports may be found on the Trust's website.

More information on the Trust, how to join, become a volunteer or support its activities with a donation, is available on the Wey & Arun Canal Trust website: https://weyarun.org.uk/

The Trust's address is:
Flitchfold Farm, Vicarage Hill, Loxwood, Billingshurst RH14 0RH, West Sussex. Telephone: 01403 752403

Other Sussex Canals

Over in Chichester, there is another canal which links the city with the harbour. Boats can and do use the first part of the canal near Chichester Station, but unfortunately navigation comes to an abrupt halt after that. One day, it is hoped that the major blockage will be removed – although much work has already been done, it will be another mighty task.

Over in the far east of the county of Sussex, there is a short stretch of the *Royal Military Canal* in Sussex – the rest is in Kent. This is a handsome canal well worth following on foot.

Dr. Holmes, the mass murderer

Sources:
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Herman Webster Mudgett may be a name that is not familiar to you. He was better known as Dr. Henry Howard Holmes or H. H. Holmes or *The Beast of Chicago.* Let's just call him Holmes.

Holmes was an American serial killer, probably the first in America. He admitted his crimes and confessed to 27 murders but was convicted and sentenced to death for only one murder, that of accomplice and business partner Benjamin Pitezel. Despite the confession of the 27 murders during the Pitezel trial, it is speculated that Holmes may have killed as many as 200 people – according to Dirk C. Gibson in his 2009 book: Serial Killing for Profit: Multiple Murder for Money.

He began killing people to steal their property. In 1893, Holmes was arrested for insurance fraud after a fire at his home, but he was soon released. Victims were killed in a mixed-use building which he owned, located about 3 miles west of the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition, supposedly called the World's Fair Hotel (informally called "The Murder Castle"), though evidence suggests the hotel portion was never truly open for business.

Besides being a serial killer, Holmes was also a confidence tickster and a bigamist, the subject of more than 50 lawsuits in Chicago alone. Holmes was executed on 7th May 1896 - nine days before his 35th birthday.

One of Holmes' early murder victims was his mistress, Julia Smythe. She was the wife of Ned (Icilius) Conner, who had moved into Holmes' building and began working at his pharmacy's jewellery counter. After Conner found out about Smythe's affair with Holmes, he resigned his job and moved away, leaving Smythe and her daughter Pearl behind. Smythe gained custody of Pearl and remained at the hotel, continuing her relationship with Holmes. Julia and Pearl disappeared on Christmas Eve of 1891, and Holmes later claimed she had died during an abortion, though what truly happened to the two was never confirmed. Another likely Holmes paramour, Emeline Cigrande, began working in the building in May 1892, and disappeared that December. Another woman who vanished, Edna Van Tassel, is also believed to have been among Holmes' victims.

Chillingly he admitted:
"I was born with the devil in me. I could not help the fact that I was a murderer, no more than the poet can help the inspiration to sing—I was born with the "Evil One" standing as my sponsor beside the bed where I was ushered into the world, and he has been with me since."

Africans in medieval and early modern England

Excerpted from BBC's Learn & Revise, by Dr Onyeka Nubia, University of Nottingham, and Edgehill, a historian of British history.

You might think that the only people in medieval and early modern England (1066-1485) were Normans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, with no space for Africans in that society. You'd be wrong as we now know some cities in pre-colonial England had diverse populations and Africans lived there.

But who were they and what did they do?
The medieval English writer Richard Devizes describes London as being populated by 'Garamantes' (Moorish Africans), and 'men from all nations' that 'fill all the houses.' These Africans were described by various terms such as: 'Black', 'Ethiopian' (a word used at the time to describe all Africans), 'Moor,' and 'Blackamoore.' Other terms such as 'Saracen' were also used to refer to Africans, as well as people from elsewhere, such as Western Asia. Some of these terms are now considered derogatory.

Africans were a significant presence in cities such as London, Plymouth and Bristol, but were also present in: Derby, Leicester, and Northampton. Africans also lived in rural villages such as Barnstable (North Devon), Holt (Worcestershire), and Hatherleigh (West Devon). Queen Elizabeth I had her 'favourite lytle Blackamore,' the powerful politician Robert Cecil had a servant named Fortunatus, and Katherine of Aragon her 'lady of the bedchamber' — Catalina de Motril.

Some of these Africans and their descendants were born in Tudor England and others had origins from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). Africans also came to England from kingdoms in West and North Africa and some people arrived via the Caribbean and Central America. These people were often connected to English merchant adventurers.

It is not possible to know the exact number of Africans living in early modern England. But they were certainly more than a few isolated individuals. In the cosmopolitan parish of St Botolph without Aldgate (London), Africans made up 5% of the total population.

In London's Cheapside, a famous but unnamed African craftsman lived between the years 1553-1558. This man of African descent came from the Iberian Peninsula and brought the art for making 'fine Spanish needles' to England. William Harrison described him as someone who would never share the secrets of his art and so the historian Thomas Fuller states his art *'dyed with him.'*

You can read Dr Nubia's complete story online at:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z8gpm39

10 important medieval dates

Excerpted from: https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/dates-middle-ages-black-death-battle-hastings-bannockburn-agincourt-bosworth-magna-carta-peasants-revolt-crusades/

In the history of Europe, the Middle Ages or Medieval Period lasted from the 5th to the 15th century. It began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merged into the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery. The Middle Ages is the middle period of the three traditional divisions of Western history: classical antiquity, the medieval period, and the modern period. The medieval period is itself subdivided into the Early, High, and Late Middle Ages. If you don't know the battle of Bosworth from the battle of Bannockburn, or are confused between Magna Carta and Domesday Book, the *BBC's History Extra* website has got you covered with 10 key medieval dates you need to know, starting with King Harold's downfall at Hastings in 1066 and finishing with Richard III's defeat at Bosworth in 1485. Here's an excerpt:

1066: The battle of Hastings and the Norman conquest: The Norman conquest of 1066 marked a dramatic and irreversible turning point in English history. In the battle of Hastings, the Anglo-Saxon king Harold II failed to defend his realm from the Norman invasion forces of William, Duke of Normandy (later known as William the Conqueror). The victorious William set about transforming the face of Anglo-Saxon England. He skillfully secured his hold on the lands he had invaded, replacing the English ruling class with Norman counterparts and built defensive fortresses at strategic points throughout the kingdom, he reorganised the church strengthened England's links to Europe.

1085: The Domesday Book is completed: The Domesday Book is England's earliest surviving public record, unsurpassed in depth and detail until the introduction of censuses in the 19th century. William the Conqueror realised the need to record the country's financial resources to assess how much taxation he could reap from the land to fund a potential war. He ordered a nationwide survey of landholdings and financial assets. The monumental resulting document, the *Domesday Book*, catalogues the kingdom's taxable goods and the identities of England's landholders at the time. The book now survives in two volumes: *Great Domesday* and *Little Domesday*.

1095: The First Crusade is decreed: Pope Urban II's official call for "holy war" in 1095 heralded the beginning of centuries of religious conflict. The crusades were a significant and long-lasting movement that saw European Christian knights mount successive military campaigns in attempts to conquer the Holy Land. Religious conflict peaked during the 12th and 13th centuries and its impact can be traced throughout the Middle Ages. Muslims in the Holy Land were not the only target of the crusades. Crusade campaigns were directed against a variety of people viewed as enemies of Christendom.

1170: The murder of Thomas Becket: Bloody proof of overflowing tensions in the ongoing power struggle between the medieval church and crown, the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170 has gone down in history for its shocking brutality. Becket had become chancellor to King Henry II in 1161 and archbishop of Canterbury. From then on, the harmonious relationship with the king went from bad to worse, with Becket fighting for the interests of the church, often in opposition to the wishes of the his king. Four knights travelled to Canterbury and, on 29th December 1170 they brutally murdered Becket in his own cathedral.

1215: Magna Carta is signed: Sealed by King John at Runnymede on 15th June 1215, *Magna Carta* (meaning 'great charter') became a founding document of the English legal system. Following a period of political and military upheaval in England, King John reluctantly signed *Magna Carta* as part of peace negotiations with rebel barons. At the time the agreement had little impact, as King John swiftly backtracked on its promises, prompting civil war. *Magna Carta's* real significance lay within its many clauses that ensured its influential legacy in English history. As the first document to establish that everyone, including monarchs, was subject to the law, *Magna Carta* laid the foundation for legally limiting the power of the sovereignty. Its 39th clause, meanwhile, ensured the right of all 'free men' to a fair trial. The fundamental principles laid down in *Magna Carta* proved central to the establishment of the English legal system. Three clauses from the original *Magna Carta* still remain on the statute books today. These establish the liberties of the English Church (Clause 1), the privileges of the City of London (Clause 13) and the right to trial by jury (Clauses 39 & 40).

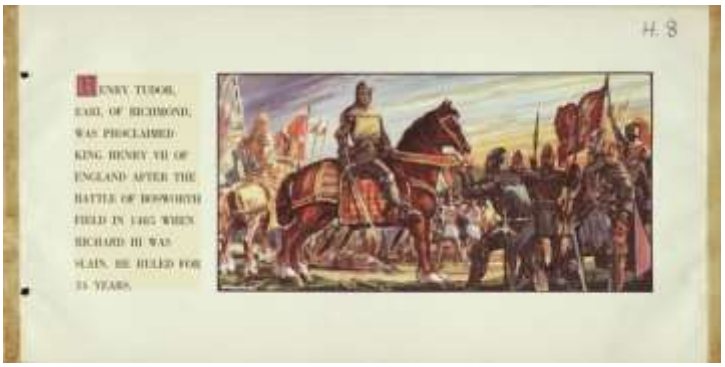
1314: The battle of Bannockburn: The battle of Bannockburn saw Scottish leader Robert the Bruce take on the English king, Edward II, in a pivotal conflict in Scotland's fight for independence. In 1296 Anglo-Scottish tensions spilled over into open warfare when English forces under Edward I invaded Scotland. By 1314, when the Scottish Wars of Independence had been raging for many years, Edward II's hold over Scotland had begun to crumble. In an attempt to restore his grasp on the kingdom Edward II amassed a large body of troops to relieve Stirling Castle, which had been besieged by the forces of Robert the Bruce. However, Edward's attempt to regain control backfired, as the Scots prepared to face the English forces head-on in what became the battle of Bannockburn on 23rd and 24th June 1314. English casualties were heavy and Edward was forced to retreat. Bannockburn dealt a significant blow to English control over Scotland and Edward's withdrawal left areas of northern England vulnerable to Scottish raids and attacks. Robert the Bruce's victory proved decisive for Scotland, solidifying the country's independence and strengthening his grip over his kingdom and, in 1324, he finally gained papal recognition as king of Scotland.

1348: The Black Death comes to Britain: The summer of 1348 saw the first outbreak of the bubonic plague in England, leading to an epidemic of huge proportions. The disease is estimated to have killed between a third and a half of the population – a devastating and unprecedented death rate. Known as the Black Death, the bubonic plague was caused by a bacterium now know as yersinia pestis. Without any knowledge of how it was transmitted, the disease spread like wildfire, particularly in urban areas. Once infected, few recovered and almost all died within three days, usually without any fever. The dramatic death toll had a significant impact on the social and economic landscape of Britain in the following decades.

1381: The Peasants' Revolt: The first large-scale uprising in English history, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 threatened the existing social structure and undermine the country's ruling elite. The introduction of a 3rd poll tax (raised to fund the war against France) promted the revolt which had a particularly damaging effect on the poor. As events escalated, government ministers were attacked and their homes destroyed. The chaos peaked as rioters captured and executed the king's treasurer and the archbishop of Canterbury. Soon, the rioters' demands expanded and they called for the abolition of serfdom and outlawry, and the division of lordship among all men. They also railed against the corruption of the church, demanding that its wealth be distributed among the people. The 14-year-old King Richard II met with one of the central figures of the revolt, Wat Tyler, to discuss the rioters' grievances but Tyler was murdered by William Walworth (Lord Mayor of London). Following Tyler's death, government troops sought out and executed those who had rebelled, and resistance crumbled.

1415: Henry V defeats the French at Agincourt: Soon after becoming king of England in 1413, the ambitious young Henry V turned his attention to expanding his realm. During his father's reign he had pushed for an invasion of France, and as they were undergoing a period of political turmoil under an elderly monarch (Charles VI) it was thought to be the perfect time to launch an assault on the vulnerable kingdom. After landing in France on 13th August 1415 and besieging the town of Harfleur, Henry's troops marched on Calais. The French army met them at Agincourt and Henry's men found themselves outnumbered as a bloody battle ensued. Despite outnumbering their enemy, the French death toll was significant and Henry claimed victory for England The defeat proved devastating to French morale, while Henry's reputation on the continent was enhanced dramatically. Henry was welcomed back to Dover with triumph and the story of his illustrious victory at Agincourt was celebrated for centuries to come.

1485: Richard III is defeated at the battle of Bosworth Field: In the last major battle of the War of the Roses, in August 1485, King Richard III was defeated and killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field by the Lancastrian Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond. After the battle, the royal crown which Richard had worn into the fray, was picked out of a bush and placed on Henry's head. Henry's victory was against the odds as Richard's army of 15,000 vastly outnumbered his own by 3 to 1. As the last major conflict of the Wars of the Roses and one that heralded the end of the Plantagenet dynasty, the battle of Bosworth marked a significant turning point in British history. It signalled the end of the medieval era and beginning of the Tudor period.



Picture Credit: "Henry Tudor Earl of Richmond King Henry VII of England (carriage print)" by Harry Winslade is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Don't interrupt

Last week Ronnie went to the Rialto cinema in town to see an 'oldie': "*Slumdog Millionaire*" but because two women were busy chatting loudly together - sitting in the row in front, poor Ronnie couldn't hear the film dialogue clearly.

Ronnie leaned forward and said in a stage whisper, *'Excuse me ladies but I can't hear.'*

'I should hope not,' stormed the women, *'this is a private conversation.'*

What character was removed from our alphabet?

Found on Dictionary.com

&

The ampersand today is used primarily in business names, but that small character was actually once the 27th member of our alphabet. Where did it come from though? The origin of its name is almost as bizarre as the name itself.

Where did ampersand come from?
The shape of the character (&) predates the word ampersand by more than 1,500 years. In the first century, Roman scribes wrote in cursive, so when they wrote the Latin word et which means "and," they linked the E and T. Over time, the combined letters came to signify the word and in English as well. Certain versions of the ampersand clearly reveal the origin of the shape.

Why was & part of the English alphabet?
The word ampersand came many years later when & was actually part of the English alphabet. In the early 1800s, school children reciting their ABCs concluded the alphabet with the &. It would have been confusing to say "X, Y, Z, and." So, the students said, "and per se and." Per se means "by itself," so the students were essentially saying, "X, Y, Z, and by itself and." The term *per se* was used to denote letters that also doubled as words, such as the letter I (for "me") and A. By saying "*per se*," you clarified that you meant the symbol and not the word.

Over time, "and per se and" was slurred together into the word we use today: ***ampersand***. When a word comes about from a mistaken pronunciation, it's called a *mondegreen*. (If you sing the wrong lyrics to a song, that's also known as a *mondegreen*.) The ampersand is also used in an unusual configuration where it appears as "&c" and means etc. The ampersand does double work as the E and T.

The ampersand isn't the only former member of the alphabet. You can learn what led to the extinction of the thorn and the wynn at: https://www.dictionary.com/e/letters-alphabet/ .

Finish with a Smile

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