

FASCINATING FACTS

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Fascinating Facts is a free subscription monthly private circulation e-magazine of personal, historic and military interest.
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Welcome to this issue of Fascinating Facts. Now retired, with a background of journalism, literature production, international public relations, and ex editor of a leading industry publications, I now have the time to combine my abilities and share my interests in historic facts, especially in connection with military matters. While I have written most of the articles in the Scarletman I am happy to accept ideas and contributions from readers; giving them credit for their work. The Scarletman is free issue e-magazine therefore if you would like to circulate copies further then I am happy for you to create a wider readership of those with a similar interest to mine.

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FUN FACTS ABOUT NOVEMBER

For the US, November is a special time as every four years it is when the month of the Presidential election.

It was November 1918 when WW1 ended. Today, the world honours this 11th of November. In the UK, it is a day of remembrance honour those who died.

In the UK November 5th is Bonfire Night and the attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605

November has two zodiac signs Scorpio and Sagittarius. You are Scorpio if you're born from the 1st to the 22nd and Sagittarius if you're born after 23rd.

November is also an important time in many religions as Diwali and All Saints Day are both celebrated at the beginning of the month.

While in the northern hemisphere November is full of brown falling leaves but for those in the southern hemisphere it is a month of spring

Traditionally, November was the ninth month in the 10-month Roman calendar but after a Gregorian calendar reform adding two months it became the 11th month as two new months were added. Novem actually means nine when translated from Latin to English.

Scientists have conducted research to come to the conclusion that babies born in the month of November are usually smart, intuitive and curious.

For the Anglo-Saxons November "Wind Monath" because the wind would start to chill the bones and the second s "Blood Monath", because the cattle went to slaughter. Made fat during summer and saved on feed in winter.

Official flower November is chrysanthemum or 'golden flower' which represents honesty, joy and optimism.

Official birthstone of November is topaz. An orange-yellow gemstone representin friendship. The Greeks believed Topaz had the power to turn you invisible.

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LUTYENS AND THE LONDON EMPTY TOMB CENOTAPH

English war memorials, prior to the 20th century, had mostly been a celebration of victory with wealth and social standing determining to whom they were commemorated. There were almost no monuments to the soldiers and sailors buried in unmarked graves overseas, or at sea.

Attitudes began to change when memorials were erected to the dead of the Crimean War and the Second Boer War. But after the WW1 the scale of the loss and bereavement demanded a more fitting response at a national level. It was in response to this that the Cenotaph was proposed.

TEMPORARY MONUMENT

The eminent architect Lutyens was approached to design a monument to be part of the Peace Day events on 19th July. He suggested a temporary Cenotaph made of wood and plaster. Such was the success that more than a million people visited the site within a week of the parade. This led to proposals for a permanent form on which the government agreed. Construction began in May 1920.

Lutyens concept was slightly radical and elegant at the same time. A simple, non-denominational monument - for people of all religions and creeds who had died in the war. - The word Cenotaph comes from the Greek for 'empty tomb'. - that would rise as a 10 metre-high pylon topped by a sar-

phagus and a wreath. The only words to be carved on it being The Glorious Dead No sooner had the parade passed the temporary memorial, than mourners started to lay wreaths around its base. Soon there were thousands of people wishing to pay their respects. Within days of the Peace Day remembrance it was decided that a permanent stone version of the Cenotaph would be constructed, and formally recognised as the country's national war memorial.

DIMINISHING TIERS

Built from Portland stone, based on a rectangular plan, with gradually diminishing tiers, culminating in a sculpted tomb chest which gives it its name of Cenotaph; a monument to those who died in a war. The structure rises to a height of just over 35 feet and is 15 by 9 feet at the base. Lutyens described it as "an empty tomb uplifted on a high pedestal".

No lines on the Cenotaph are straight. The sides are not parallel

but are subtly curved using precise geometry barely visible to the naked eye (entasis). If extended, the apparently vertical lines would meet 1,000 feet above the ground and the apparently horizontal surfaces lines are sections of a sphere whose centre would be 900 feet below ground.

RELATIVE TO ALL PEOPLE

The use of curvature and diminishing tiers is intended to draw the eye upwards in a spiralling direction to the coffin at the top.

Lutyens's vision was a monument that would be universal in its significance with no human figure and no national or religious imagery, making it relative to people of all races and of all faiths – or none. Some religious groups objected to the lack of Christian symbolism and suggested the inclusion of a cross or a more overtly Christian inscription. Lutyens objected to the proposal, and it was also rejected by the government on the grounds that the Cenotaph was for people "from all parts of the empire, irrespective of their religious creeds".

MILITARY CONNOTATIONS

His initial design was sculpted flags but the government disagreed. So regularly renewed cloth flags representing Britain's armed services making it a national memorial, with military connotations are used. In the early 1900's doffed their hats in respect when passing the Cenotaph. Under the care of English Heritage which manages historic buildings for the nation the Cenotaph is a Grade I listed building providing legal protection from unauthorised demolition or modification. Grade I is the highest grade, and only applies to 2.5 per cent of listed buildings. This applies to buildings of "exceptional" historical or architectural interest and is just



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Edwin Lutyens, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

WORLD MILITARY PACE STICKING COMPETITION

Few, outside of the military would know what a pace stick is used for. Consisting of 2 tapered pieces of wood hinged at the top covered and polished brass addition it is similar to a drafting compass but sized relevant to the user.

They are used by opening a set distance to match the type of marching such as quick march, double march, step short, etc. The pace stick is held by the hinge at the side of the holder's body. One leg of the stick kept vertical, and the other leg pointing forward. By twirling the stick while marching, the stick is caused to "walk" alongside its holder at the proper pace. When folded or marching, it is normally tucked tightly under the left arm and parallel to the ground, with the left hand grasping the stick near the top

USES IN HISTORY

There are several claims to its origin, Number one is the claim that Roman military engineers used a pace-stick, almost identical to the modern British Army version. The main difference being a length of rope in place of the modern brass locking bar, used to establish pace length. When the Roman pace-stick was fully open, the rope went taut and the stick was locked at that angle which measured two Roman marching paces. This was used when building roads by the

A demonstration team of Pakistan pace stickers



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Roman "sticker" turning his stick 500 times, which equated to 1 Roman Mile. At this point a mile stone would be erected. This would be done for the entire length of the road. The length of the modern day pace-sticking course is shorter

AID TO MILITARY DRILL

The Royal Regiment of Artillery also lays claim to being the originator of the pace-stick, claiming to have used it to measure the correct distances between guns, limbers and ammunition caissons. Sir John Moore, Father of the British Light Infantry states, in a training manual written in the early 1800s, around the time of the Peninsular War comments on the efficient use of pace-sticks by the Sergeant. In 1928, the late Academy Serjeant Major Arthur Brand developed a drill for the pace-stick and promoted its use as an aide to military drill, to mark out the correct dis-

tances between troops on parade and to ensure a full 30 inch marching pace was being taken. Arthur also then promoted its use throughout the British Army.

The pace stick is usually permitted to be carried by the Regimental Sergeant Major alone; however, at a particular regiment's discretion, other sergeant-majors may carry a pace stick. Within the police forces of Australia, the College Sergeant and Drill Instructors of the Australian Federal Police, the Drill Sergeant of the Victoria Police Academy and the Academy Senior Protocol Officer of the New South Wales Police Academy, holding the Rank of Senior Sergeant and the highest Senior Non Commissioned Officer, carries the pace stick as a badge of office.

INTRICATE DRILL

Participants march rotating their pace sticks in both slow then quick time alternating from left to right hand along a marked piece of the square known as the runway.

Performing a number of intricate drill moves over a 20 minute period. They are marked to the centimetre and second for accuracy and timing – it could well be described as, drill square dressage

WORLD WIDE COMPETITION

A team comprises three Sergeants with a Warrant officer, as the team captain, who gives the words of command. Teams from all over the world compete in different categories for the title of World Champion Pace-Sticking team or the individual World Pace-Stick Champion. Teams are marked, for turn out, bearing and how they perform the pace stick drill. All of which has to be achieved in perfect harmony

UNUSUAL TIN TABERNACLES

During the Industrial Revolution towns and cities expanded as the workforce moved to newly industrialised areas which resulted in the building of more than 4,000 churches. Within this population increase there was an upsurge in nonconformism which led to a demand for even more buildings. The Church of England, influenced by Pugin, the Cambridge Camden Society and John Ruskin, were initially sceptical about corrugated iron buildings as a solution

GREAT EXHIBITION

Corrugated iron buildings were exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. Corrugated iron buildings were exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. Isaac Dixon's 1874 catalogue was aimed at the landed gentry, railway proprietors and shippers while Francis Morton's company had a dedicated church building department and its 1879 catalogue reported nearly 70 churches, chapels and school houses built in the United Kingdom. Not to be daunted manufacturers found markets, in the colonies of the British Empire. Several firms, manufactured a range of iron buildings that included houses, village and sports halls, warehouses, hospital wards, chapels and churches.

EXPORTED WORLD WIDE

Many of their products were exported to Canada, Africa, California and Australia during the gold rushes. Other manufacturers of corrugated iron churches in Glasgow included Braby & Company and R. R. Speirs who supplied 75 churches between 1908 and 1914. By 1851 19 corrugated iron churches were erected in Melbourne. A church built entirely of cast A wrought iron, clad in corrugated iron was built in Jamaica at a cost of £1,000 (£110,000 in 2023). William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, wrote a pamphlet in 1890 decrying the construction of corrugated iron buildings "that were spreading like a pestilence over the country. On Thursday last the United Free Church Primitive Methodists opened a new iron building at the corner of Argyle Street and the Woodbridge Road. The building has an odd ap-

pearance, and as it is but a temporary structure, it has been not inaptly termed the "tin tabernacle". The sides and roof are of corrugated iron, and present the appearance externally of a huge tin canister."

Churches, chapels and mission halls were built in new industrial areas, pit villages, near railway works and in more isolated rural and coastal locations.

EASILY ERECTED

Churches, chapels and mission halls were built in new industrial areas, pit villages, near railway works and isolated rural and coastal locations. While many were funded by public subscription. Some landowners or employers donated plots of land and sometimes cost of building. The 3rd Marquess of Bute provided Oban's first Roman Catholic cathedral, in 1886. Lavishly decorated and furnished it lasted for 50 years until it was replaced.

Early tin churches were easily erected, but at an average cost of between £2 and £4 per sitting, were expensive. St Mark's Church in Birkenhead, built in 1867, cost more than £2,000 for 500 seats.

PRICE DECREASE

Prices decreased to £1 per sitting at the end of the century. In their 1901 catalogue David Rowell & Co advertised a church for 400 worshippers, delivered to the nearest railway station and erected on the purchaser's foundation, at a cost of £360. (£36,000 in 2023)

Isaac Dixon's 1896 catalogue stated they had sold about 150 churches over the previous 10 years.

Several tin tabernacles still survive

as places of worship; some have listed building status and some have been converted to other uses while some have been moved to museums for preservation. Such as St Chad's Mission Church was moved from near Telford to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum while St Saviour's Church from Westhouses in Derbyshire may be seen at the Midland Railway Centre's Swanwick Junction site. St Margaret's Church from South Wonston, near Winchester, Hampshire, is now located at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in West Sussex.

GRADE II LISTED

The tin tabernacle Grade II Listed building below is the Deepcut garrison church which is currently undergoing renovation. It was last used in autumn 2013 as the film set for "Kingsman: The Secret Service". Constructed of corrugated iron in 1901, considered an advanced building material it was built to serve local military units. It was dedicated on 29 September 1901 as St Michael and All Angels Garrison Church and in 1905 an adjoining acre of land was acquired from the Crown as a burial ground.

BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Electricity was installed in 1911 and the stained glass east windows in 1922. The church was renamed St Barbara in 1967. A brass plate and a window commemorate the formation of The Royal Logistic Corps, whose Book of Remembrance has been placed in the Church. It contains the names of all those who have died while serving in the RLC, on and off duty.



Ron Strutt / The Garrison church of St Barbara at Deepcut

999

WORLD'S FIRST EMERGENCY NUMBER

The world's first 999 emergency number was in London on 30 June 1937. This was later extended to cover the entire country. Initially when 999 was dialled, a buzzer sounded and a red light flashed in the exchange to attract an operator's attention. 999 is the free official emergency number for the United Kingdom, but calls on this number are also accepted on the European Union emergency number 112. All calls are answered by 999 operators. Approximately 35 million 999/112 calls are made in the UK each year, with 74 per cent from mobiles and 26 per cent from landlines in 2022

999 IMMEDIATE ACCESS

In the United Kingdom the 99 calls provides immediate access to the four principal emergency services - Police, Ambulance service, Fire and HM Coastguard. Other emergency services may also be accessed Lifeboat, Mountain, Cave and Mine rescue and Bomb disposal provided by HM Armed Forces

The 999 system was introduced following a house fire in Wimpole Street on 10 Nov. 1935, in which five women were killed. A neighbour had tried to telephone the fire brigade and was so outrage a queue by the telephone exchange that he wrote a letter to the *The Times*, prompting a government inquiry.

NATIONAL LAUNCH 1976

The initial scheme covered a 12 mile radius around Oxford Circus. The public were advised to only to use it in an emergency if for instance, the man in the flat next to yours is murdering his wife or you have seen something suspicious.

The first arrest resulting from the use of 999 was for burglary and took place a week after the scheme was launched. It was then extended to major UK cities after World War II and the whole of the UK in 1976. The 9-9-9 format was chosen based on the 'button A' and 'button B' style of pre-payment coin-operated public payphones which could be easily modified to allow free use of the 9 digit on the rotary dial in addition to

the 0 digit (used to call the operator), without allowing free use of numbers involving other digits.

The choice of 999 was ideal for accessibility, as in the dark or dense smoke it could be dialled by placing a finger one hole away from the dial stop and rotating the dial to the full extent three times.

This enabled all users including the visually impaired to dial the emergency number. Nottinghamshire Police ran a successful pilot of Pega-



sus, a database containing the details of people with physical and learning disabilities or mental health problems. Using 999 or the force's non-emergency 101 number, once a person is put through to the control room, they only need to say "Pegasus" and their PIN. Their details can then be retrieved from the database and the caller can quickly get on with explaining why they have called. Pegasus is also used by the City of London Police, Dyfed Powys Police, Surrey Police and Lincolnshire Police.

PUSH BUTTON PHONE

Use of push-button telephones can cause problems, because it is easy to accidentally push the same button repeatedly. Or operated by objects in the same pocket as the telephone or by children playing with it. This problem is less of a concern with emergency numbers that use two different digits, such as 112 and 911, although on landlines 112 suffers

much of the same risk of false generation as the 111 code which was considered and rejected when the original choice of 999 was made.

Silent solution 55 is the name given to the initiative that allows people to call 999 when they are not able to speak. If the caller does not initially respond to opening questions, the operator will then ask the caller to cough, tap their handset or make another audible sign that indicates they are in need of emergency assistance. In some instances, the call may be put through to an automated system which asks the caller to press 55 if in danger.

999 CALLS OPERATED BY BT

All telecoms providers operating in the UK are obliged as part of their licence agreement to provide a free of charge emergency operator service. Calls made on any UK network are handled by BT which operates seven 999 and 112 call centres.

Technology enables the BT operator to trace both landline and mobile telephone numbers to an address or grid reference according to the transmitter used. A number of smartphone apps can be downloaded that assist with caller location by using the smartphone's satellite navigation features which implements Advanced Mobile Location to detect an emergency call and send an emergency SMS.

CALL BEAKDOWN

The 35 million 999/112 emergency calls based on 2022 figures breakdown as Ambulance 53 percent, Police 44 per cent, Fire 3 per cent, Coastguard less than 1 per cent.

It is difficult to deal with hoaxers who have put many lives at risk with 41,187 fake calls. Overall they cost the ambulance service more than £6.5 million in the past five years equal to the salaries of 50 nurses. Nevertheless it is a custodial sentence and in 2018, Michael Gibson, was jailed for 16 months for making hundreds of bogus 999 calls.

Dispatching an ambulance costs £155 – and an air ambulance £1,700. One hoax call cost East Midlands Ambulance Service £2,465 when a child claimed a girl had been killed by a car. Yorkshire received the most hoax calls since 2017 at 8,445.

Virtually every country uses 999 as the emergency number.

LOST TECHNOLOGIES. ARE WE SO CLEVER?

ROMAN CONCRETE

The Romans first used hydraulic concrete in coastal underwater structures, probably in the harbours before the end of the 2nd century BC. The harbour of Caesarea is an example (22-15 BC) of the use of underwater Roman concrete technology on a large scale for which enormous quantities of pozzolana were imported from Puteoli.

SUPERIOR CONCRETE

Scientists studying the composition of Roman concrete, submerged under the Mediterranean Sea for the last 2,000 years, discovered that it was superior to modern-day concrete in terms of durability and less environmentally damaging. The Romans made concrete by mixing lime and volcanic rock. On underwater use, the combination of lime, volcanic ash, and seawater instantly triggered a chemical reaction with the lime incorporated molecules reacted with the ash to bind the mixture together. Analysis of the concrete found that it is different to modern day cement, which is an incredibly stable binder.

2,000 YEARS OLD CONCRETE

The ancient concrete contains the ideal crystalline structure of Tobermorite, which has a greater strength and durability than the modern equivalent. Microscopic studies identified other minerals in the ancient concrete which show potential application for high-performance concretes, including the encapsulation of hazardous wastes. "In the middle 20th century, concrete structures were designed to last 50 years," said scientist Paulo Monteiro said. "Yet Roman harbour installations have survived 2,000 years of chemical attack and wave action underwater."

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A view of the concrete dome of the Pantheon in Rome



Gary Todd, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

CHINESE EARTHQUAKE DETECTOR

Although we have come a long way in detecting, recording, and measuring seismic shocks we still cannot accurately predict earthquakes much better than the Chinese did 2,000 years ago when the first earthquake detector was invented in 132 AD by a Chinese astronomer, mathematician, engineer, and inventor called Zhang ('Chang') Heng.

ACCURATE DETECTION

The device was remarkably accurate in detecting earthquakes from afar, and did not rely on shaking or movement in the location where the device was situated. Zhang's seismoscope was a giant bronze vessel, resembling a 6 ft diameter samovar. Eight dragons snaked face-down the outside of the barrel, marking the primary compass directions. In each dragon's mouth was a small bronze ball. Beneath the dragons sat eight bronze toads, with their broad mouths gaping to receive the balls.

CORRESPONDING DATA

The sound of the ball striking one of the eight toads would alert observers to the earthquake and would give a rough indication of the earthquake's direction of origin. In 2005, scientists in Zengzhou, Zhang's hometown managed to replicate Zhang's seismoscope by detecting earthquakes based on waves from four different real-life earthquakes in China and Vietnam. The seismoscope detected all of them. and the data corresponded accurately with that gathered by modern-day seismometers!

ROMAN NANOTECHNOLOGY?

The 1,600 year old Roman Lycurgus Cup, so named due to its depiction of a scene involving King Lycurgus of Thrace. They could not work out why the cup appeared jade green when lit from the front but blood red when lit from behind depending on the direction of the light shining upon it. The mystery was solved in 1990, when researchers discovered that the Roman artisans were nanotechnology pioneers. They had impregnated the glass with silver and gold particles, ground as small as 50 nanometres in diameter, less than one-thousandth the size of a grain of table salt. The work was so precise that the resulting effect was an accident. The exact metal combination suggests the Romans had perfected the use of nanoparticles.



Brit_Mus, CC BY-SA 3.0 creativecommons. 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons



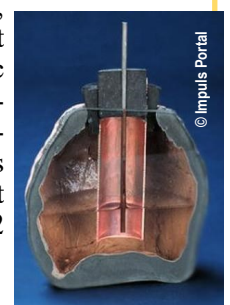
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ANCIENT ELECTRICITY

How did they see inside the Egyptian tombs and pyramids? No flaming torches as no soot deposits found inside? Did they get electricity from the Baghdad Battery?

The picture is a reconstruction of the battery which is an 18 in high clay pot encapsulating a copper cylinder with an iron rod suspended in the centre. It was filled with an acid. All held in place with an asphalt plug. These were discovered in 1936 during excavations of an old village Khujut Rabu, near Baghdad considered to be about 2000 years old. Although it is not known exactly what the use of such a device theories established in 1938 when Wilhelm Konig, a German archaeologist concluded it was an ancient electric battery.

After the WWII, Willard Gray, at General Electric High Voltage Laboratory in Pittsfield, built replicas and, found that they produced 2 volts of electricity.



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SOME INTERESTING NOVEMBER DATES

November 1st

1848 - The first female medical school in Boston founded by Samuel Gregory
1993 - The EU came into existence as result of Maastricht Treaty.
1995 - South Africa's first all-race local government elections.

November 2nd

1962 - During Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy stated Soviet bases in Cuba dismantled.

November 3rd

1534 - King Henry VIII became Supreme Head of the Church of England.
1957 - Russia launched world's first space capsule, Sputnik II, with a dog.

November 4th

1890 - First electrified under-ground railway system opened in London.
1956 - Soviet troops crushed Hungarian uprising..

November 5th

1605 Guy Fawkes Day; anniversary of failed "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up Parliament and King James I.

November 6th

1429 - Henry VI crowned King .
1917 - In WWI, 3rd Battle of Ypres ended as troops took Passchendaele.

November 7th

1917 - Russian Bolsheviks overthrew the government.
1990 - Mary Robinson became Ireland's first female president.

November 8th

1895 - X-rays discovered by Wilhelm Roentgen.
1939 - Assassination attempt on Hitler failed in Munich.

November 9th

1938 - Kristallnacht Nazi mobs burned synagogues and vandalised Jewish property.
1989 - After 28 years the 27.9 mile Berlin Wall was brought down

November 10th

1942 - Britain's was victorious at El Alamein during World War II,

November 11th

1918 - Document silencing guns of WWI was signed, now remembered by a moment of silence.

1992 - Church of England voted to allow women to become priests.

November 12th

1923 - Adolf Hitler arrested after the failed Beer Hall Putsch.
1942 - In WWII Tobruk was captured by the British Eighth Army.

November 13th

1945 - General De Gaulle appointed president of the French provisional government.
1973 - State of emergency declared after British power workers and miners began work slowdowns.

November 14th

1666 - First British experimental blood transfusion took place utilising two dogs.
1994 - First passengers on rail service through the Channel Tunnel .

November 15th

1969 - US largest antiwar rally as 250,000 protested Vietnam War.

November 16th

1995 - UN charged Bosnian Serb leaders with genocide.

November 17th

1558 - 25 year old Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne
1869 - The Suez Canal was opened after 10 years construction

November 18th

1477 - William Caxton printed the first book in English language. .
1993 - South Africa adopted a constitution ending white rule.

November 18th

1493 - Puerto Rico was discovered by Columbus during his second voyage to the New World.
1703 - "Man in the Iron Mask," died. His identity unknown.

November 19th

1942 - The Russian Army began a counter-offensive against the Germans at Stalingrad during WW II.
1990 - The Cold War came to an end during a summit in Paris.

November 20th

1917 - First use of tanks in battle occurred during World War I.
1945 - The Nuremberg War Crime Trials convicted 24 former Nazi's with crimes against humanity
1947 - Princess Elizabeth married Philip Mountbatten.
1992 - Fire erupted inside Queen Elizabeth's residence at Windsor Castle causing extensive damage.

November 21th

1783 - First 25 minute free balloon flight in Paris in a hot air balloon. .
1920 - The IRA killed 14 British soldiers on "Bloody Sunday."
1992 - The Anglican Church of Australia voted to allow women to become priests. .

November 22nd

1497 - Vasco Da Gama, first to sail round the Cape of Good Hope,
1935 - Trans-Pacific airmail service
1963 - President John Kennedy shot
1990 - Margaret Thatcher resigned - longest 20th century Prime Minister

November 23rd

1874 - Joseph Glidden patented his invention of barbed wire.
1998 - Queen Elizabeth II announced centuries-old right of aristocrats to sit ceased.

November 25th

1974 - Britain outlawed the IRA following the deaths of 21 persons in a pub bombing in Birmingham.
1995 - By less than one percent, Ireland voted to legalise divorce, the closest vote in the nation's history.

November 26th

1703 - A great two day storm struck southern England, flooding rivers, and killing at least 8,000 persons.
1922 - In Egypt, Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon first went inside the tomb of King Tutankhamen.
1940 - Nazis walled off the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw, sealing in 400,000
1992 - Queen Elizabeth II agreed to pay taxes on her personal income.

November 27th

1701 - Anders Celsius who invented the centigrade (Celsius) temperature scale was born in Sweden.

November 28

1919 - Lady Nancy Astor was elected as the first female in the British

November 29th

1947 - Palestine partitioned into Jewish and Arab resulting in the Jewish state of Israel.
1989 - 12 day revolution in Czechoslovakia ended forty-one years of communist rule

November 30

1782 - Provisional peace treaty between GB and the USA ended America's War of Independence.
1939 - Finland was invaded by 20 Russian divisions in the Winter War.

WORLD FAMOUS BUILDING 10 DOWNING STREET

Originally three houses No 10 Downing Street is the private residence of the British Prime Minister. Built over 300 years ago it contains approximately 100 rooms. The third floor is the residence of the prime minister. The other floors contain offices and conference, reception, sitting and dining rooms where the prime minister works, and where government ministers, national leaders and foreign dignitaries are met and hosted. At the rear is a 1/2 acre walled courtyard and a terrace.

Originally a mansion overlooking St James's Park called "the House at the Back", it had a town house and cottage behind it. The street gets its name from Sir George Downing who built the houses

NOTORIOUS SPY

Downing, a notorious spy for Oliver Cromwell, and Charles II, employed Christopher Wren in 1682 to design the houses which were erected quickly and cheaply on soft soil with shallow foundations. Winston Churchill wrote that Number 10 was "shaky and lightly built by the profiteering contractor whose name they bear".

During renovation it was discovered that the brickwork was London yellow stock bricks, a mellow honey colour still familiar on many London houses. But over two centuries of severe pollution they had become discoloured so to keep the familiar black appearance the brickwork was cleaned and painted black.

Downing Street is a cul-de-sac with closed off access to St James's Park, making the street quiet and private. An advertisement in 1720 described it as a pretty open place, especially at the upper end, where are four or five very large and well-built houses, fit for Persons of Honour and Quality.

BECAME NEGLECTED

The house was offered to Robert Walpole, who commissioned William Kent to join the three houses which is now known as Number 10 Downing Street, by King George II in 1732 as a gift to the office of First Lord of the Treasury. A position, since 1905, held



by the prime minister. Despite its convenient location near Parliament, few early prime ministers lived there so it became neglected, and run-down to the point where, several times, it was scheduled to be demolished. But it survived and has become a jewel in the national heritage.

Government property its registered legal title is held in the name of the secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities. Number 10 has been known as the prime minister's official home for over one hundred years

The "House at the Back", was the largest of the three houses built as a mansion in about 1530 next to Whitehall Palace and was originally one of several buildings that made up the "Cockpit Lodgings", because they were part of a structure used for cock-fighting.

CAPTURED GUY FAWKES

For many years, it was the home of Thomas Knevet, Keeper of Whitehall Palace, famous for capturing Guy Fawkes in 1605 and foiling his plot to assassinate King James I.

From then on the "House at the Back" was usually occupied by members of the royal family or the government. Princess Elizabeth, eldest daughter of King James I, lived there from 1604 until 1613 when she married Frederick V, Elector Palatine and moved to Heidelberg. She was the grandmother of King George I, the Elector of Hanover, who became King of Great Britain in 1714, and was the great-grandmother of King George II, who presented the house to Wal-

pole in 1732.

The first Politician to live at No 10 was Johann Caspar von Bothmer, Premier Minister of the Electorate of Hanover, head of the German Chancery and adviser to George I and II. He took up residency in 1720. Although he complained about "the ruinous condition of the premises he lived there until his death in 1732.

CABINET WAR ROOMS

In 1902, Arthur James Balfour, became Prime Minister and he was already living in Number 10. He revived the custom that Number 10 is the First Lord and Prime Minister's official residence.

The flat became known as the No.10 Annexe, and lay above the much more comprehensive underground bunker used by Winston Churchill and now known as the Cabinet War Rooms. To reassure the people his government was functioning normally, he insisted on being seen entering and leaving Number 10. Harold Wilson, from 1974 to 1976, lived Lord North Street because Mary Wilson wanted "a proper home".

HISTORIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

For most of his premiership, Tony Blair lived in the more spacious residence above Number 11 to accommodate his wife and four children. David Cameron, also had four small children and took up residence above Number 11, and his Chancellor, George Osborne, Number 10.

Prime Ministers made historic announcements from the front step. Perhaps the most historic being Neville Chamberlain's Anglo-German Agreement of Friendship, Neville Chamberlain which proclaimed "Peace with honour" in 1938 after his meeting with Adolf Hitler.

EXPENSIVE RENOVATION

The building was not hit during the London Blitz although in February 1944 a bomb fell on Horse Guards Parade and blew in some of the drawing-room windows.

In 1958 new foundations with deep pilings were laid and the original buildings reassembled on top of it, allowing for expansion and modernisation. What could not be repaired was replicated. A formidable undertaking costing £3,000,000 (£58,000,000 in 2023).



For luck in love, couples deliberately break plates keeping up with many years of tradition. The first one I experienced was a Polterabend in Germany when one of the guests actually brought a toilet pan. He stood on the first floor and dropped it onto the concrete drive below where it duly smashed into pieces. Today, extra-thin and inexpensive plates — specially made for breaking are replacing porcelain and pottery.



HISTORIC CONNOTATION

The custom probably derives from several aspects of ancient practice by ritually "killing" plates on mourning occasions as a means of dealing with loss. An annual ceremony to clear-out all broken pottery items. Another aspect could also be related to the ancient practice of conspicuous consumption, or a public display of one's wealth, as plates or glasses are thrown into a fireplace following a banquet instead of being washed and reused. Others say this tradition comes from the 16 century Venetians who threw all their old and useless objects and pots out of their windows. Others say it comes from Pagans symbolising the welcoming of spring. Whatever its origin it stays alive today.

GERMAN POLTERABEND

In Germany, smashing porcelain plates is a wedding custom said to bring good fortune and harmony to newly-weds. On the night before a wedding, those invited bring plates and similar

items, not glass or mirrors because they symbolises happiness. Mirrors should not be broken due to the old superstition that breaking a mirror will bring seven years of bad luck.

The violent smashing, and cheering by friends and family creates a cacophony of sound to chase away evil spirits. The shards are then traditionally swept up by the betroth to indicate working together.

While the Polterabend is celebrated in Germany it is also celebrated and in the western parts of Poland where there was a significant German cultural influences. Polterabend has also been part of the wedding preparation for centuries in Sweden, Finland and in some rural areas in Brazil among the descendants of immigrants.

As destructive as it may appear, the symbolic custom of shattering items during weddings and other events is common in many cultures. For instance, Greek weddings also entail smashing plates, while couples at Jewish wedding ceremonies step on a glass to break it.

TRADITION REVIVED

In recent years Kefalonian's, who live on an island in the Ionian Sea, west of Greece, have revived the tradition and now crowds gather in the main square of Argostoli to celebrate Christ's first resurrection. The reaking of the pots symbolises the victory of life against death and good against evil. Red banners are hung from the balconies. Once the bells ring at 12 o'clock breaking of the pots starts, accompanied by the philharmonic bands playing triumphant music, and then live folklore music and dancing takes over!



MODERN CHANGE

In 1969, the military dictatorship of Georgios Papadopoulos, that had suspended democracy and ruled Greece autocratically from 1967 to 1974, banned plate smashing. Nowadays specially-produced plaster plates are used. Another modern variation on the custom is for diners at small Greek restaurants or tavernas to buy trays of flowers that they can throw at singers and each other.

THE DANISH TWIST

The Danish have a different way of breaking plates. If you are in Denmark over New Year's Eve, you could wake up to a pile of smashed plates on your front door step.

During the year, the Danes save any broken dishes, plates, cups, or bowls until New Year's Eve.

Traditionally, on New Year, they threw the broken dishware at the homes of friends and family as a way to wish them good luck for the New Year. But now it is less violent as people pre-break their plates and put the fragments at the doorways of family, friends and neighbours. The bigger the pile the more luck you will have in the upcoming year!

The tradition dates back centuries and is one of the more unique ways to ring in the New Year. It's a measure of personal popularity to find a heap of broken china on your doorstep. According to tradition, this brings good luck, so the more smashed plates, the more luck you'll get. It measures your good fortune in terms of the amount of friends you have!

The porcelain manufacturers empty their warehouses of seconds in the weeks leading up to New Years Eve.



The word conker most likely comes from the French word conque meaning to "knock out" as the game was originally played using snail shells and small bits of string. The name may also be influenced by the verb conquer, as earlier games involving shells and hazelnuts have also been called conquerors. Conkers are also known as cheesers relating to a conker which has one or more flat sides, caused by it sharing its pod with other conkers (twins or triplets). Also Cheggers was used in Lancaster, in the 1920s. In D. H. Lawrence's book Sons and Lovers, the game is referred to as cobbles. The game of conkers is predominantly played in England, however similar games are also played in other parts of the world - often called something different names. In Puerto Rico: it is known as 'gullets' in the USA it is known both as 'conkers' but also as 'buckeyes', Ireland it is also known as conkers. Due to the ex-pat influence it is also played in Australia.

COMPETITION ORIGIN

Although the first recorded game of conkers is believed to have taken place in the Isle of Wight in 1848, the World Conker Championships started in Ashton, Northamptonshire in 1965. It was on Ashton village green, surrounded by horse chestnut trees, that the World Conker Championships were first conceived.

Things started in a small way when a group of regulars at the local pub were thwarted by bad weather in their attempt to organise a fishing expedition. The suggestion that they play conkers was made and taken up. A small prize was awarded to the winner and a collection was made for



charity by someone who had a blind relative. This then became an annual event with entrants increasing in number and any resulting money being donated to the Royal National Institute for the Blind for Talking Books.

ITS GROWTH

In the early years many of the winners were local, some individuals taking the title on more than one occasion. When a sprinkling of people from other countries started to participate, it became a truly international event. Over the years there have been entries from Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and the United States. In 1976 the title went overseas for the first time when was won by the Mexican, Jorge Ramirez. In 2000



the first overseas Ladies title was claimed by Austria's Selma Becker. With its growing popularity, the event expanded to accommodate more players and a Ladies event was introduced alongside the very popular team competitions, run in conjunction with the individual

BASIC RULES OF THE GAME :

- Conkers drawn 'blind' from a bag.
- Players may reject up to 3.
- The game starts with toss of a coin—winner electing to strike or receive.
- Free distance between nut and knuckle no less than 8" or 20 cm.
- Each player has three alternate strikes, no deliberate miss hits.
- One conker smashed ends game less than a third remaining judged out,
- If nuts smash at the same time the match shall be replayed.
- Nut knocked of lace but not smashed re threaded and game continued.
- A player causing more than three lace knottings will be disqualified



events. Junior competitions now have 3 sections and attract schools from neighbouring counties. All of this has resulted in 400 competitors and up to 5,000 spectators resulting in more funds for the visually impaired. So far around £415,000 has been raised for charities.

RECENT HISTORY

In 2009 the event moved away from Ashton to a larger venue to accommodate more players, spectators and stalls. Unfortunately, due to the exposed nature of the site, this led us to relocate once more, to the village of Southwick where the championships have been held since 2013. taking place each year on the 2nd Sunday of October, in the beautiful village of Southwick near Oundle. Here we are hosted in the grounds of the local pub, the Shuckburgh Arms, and supported by the villagers. The next championships take place on the 8th of October 2023 starting at 9:30 and finishing at around 16:00.

Prior to the game, over 2,000 conkers - 1.25-inch (30 mm) width are collected, drilled and strung ready by tournament officials.

PENSIONER COMPETITORS

Since 2017 a team of Chelsea Pensioners have competed in the competition. With that first year marked by Chelsea Pensioner John Riley winning his section and becoming King Conker. I organised a group of 8 to travel by car and stay over night. Roy the local town crier at the competition eventually became a Chelsea Pensioner and now organises the group of contestants