

FASCINATING FACTS

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DRAGONS FACT OR FICTION?



Easy-Peasy.AI

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.

In this issue In this issue In this issue

3	LAMPY THE £1,000,000 GARDEN GNOME
4	BRITAIN'S WONKIEST PUB
5	THE PILORY & HUMILIATION DEVICES
6	GREAT STOCK EXCHANGE FRAUD OF 1814
7	DRAGONS TAKE YOUR CHOICE!
8	FIREFIGHTING IN ANTARCTICA
9	TWO FIRES OF THE GATES OF HELL
10	20,000 HOLY RATS AND THE KARNI MATA TEMPLE
IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE	

??DID YOU KNOW??

California is the most populous U.S. state with about 39.43 million people.

Bhutan is the most mountainous country where mountains cover almost 99 percent of its area.

Canada has the longest coastline— 151,019 miles long.

Greenland is the largest island in the world.

Mount Everest is the tallest mountain on earth with an elevation of over 29,000 feet.

The great wall of China is over 13,000 miles, half of the equator's length.

The pacific ocean is the biggest ocean on earth covering over 60 million square miles.

Vatican City is the world's smallest country.

Australia is wider than the moon being approximately 4,000 kilometres wide, while the moon's diameter is 3,474 kilometres.

India is the world's most populous country with a population of 1.4 billion people.

The amazon rainforest is the world's largest rainforest covering an approximately 2.7 million square miles.

At 4,130 miles the Nile is the world's longest river.

Currently Australia is the only nation that is both a country and a continent.

Alaska has over 140 active volcanoes.

Rhode Island is the smallest U.S. state.

South Africa has three capitals Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Pretoria.

The Pacific Ocean, covering over 60 million square miles is the biggest ocean on Earth.

Brazil is the largest country in South America.

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LAMPY THE £1,000,000 GARDEN GNOME

Garden gnomes (German: Gartenzwerg, lit. 'garden dwarfs') are ornamental lawn figurines of small humanoid creatures based on the mythological creature and diminutive spirit which occur in Renaissance magic and alchemy, known as gnomes. Traditionally, the garden figurines depict male dwarfs wearing red pointy hats and typically, stand between one and two feet (30 and 60 cm) tall. Originating as a decoration for the wealthy in Europe, garden gnomes are now prevalent in gardens and lawns throughout the Western world, among all social classes.

ANCIENT PREDECESSORS

Homes in Ancient Rome, had small stone statues depicting the Greco-Roman fertility god Priapus, also claimed to be a protector of beehives, flocks, and vineyards, they were frequently placed in Roman gardens.

Gnomes, as magical creatures were first described during the Renaissance period by Swiss alchemist Paracelsus as "diminutive figures two spans in height who did not like to mix with humans". During this period, 1 m tall stone "grotesques", were typically garishly painted, figurines, commonly placed in the gardens of the wealthy. Among the figures depicted were gobbi (Italian for hunchbacks). In particular, Jacques Callot produced 21 versions of gobbi, which he engraved and printed in 1616.

THE LITTLE FOLK

By the late 18th century, gnome-like figurines made of wood or porcelain, known by names including "dwarves", had become popular household decorations in some parts of Europe. In particular, the area surrounding the town of Brienz in Switzerland was known for their production of wooden house dwarves. In Germany, these figurines became connected with pre-existing folk stories and beliefs about dwarves that they believed helped around the mines and on the farm.

The Dresden company Baehr and Maresch had small ceramic statues of "dwarves" or "little folk" in stock as early as 1841. Hence, while the claim has been contested, some credit Baehr

LAMPY THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE GNOME

Phillip Griebel, a German sculptor began creating garden gnomes as garden decorations in the 19th century, in tune with popular legends of gnomes in Germany. Following a visit to Germany in 1847, Sir Charles Isham returned with a set of 21 terra cotta gnomes.

After reaching the U.K. their spread was unstoppable, especially after Sir Isham sprinkled the grounds of his estate, Lampport Hall with the diminutive decorations.

SURVIVAL

Of the original 21 gnomes brought back from Germany, only one still survives as on his death Sir Isham's daughters, who hated the gnomes, removed 20 of them from their property, but for some reason they overlooked one. The gnome that got away was called Lampy, and he has happily made his home at Lampport Hall since his journey from Germany in 1847. Over 150 years old, he is considered the oldest garden gnome in the world.

THE £1MILLION GNOME

In 1997, Lampy was insured for £1 million and is estimated to be worth £2 million.



Replica of Lampy. The original is on display at Lampport Hall.

and Maresch with creating the first garden gnomes. Within less than 10 years, statues of dwarves had spread from the provinces of Saxony and Thuringia, across Germany and into France. The manufacture of dwarves spread across Germany, with numerous manufacturers each having its own particular style of design.

Garden gnomes spread to other countries in Europe in the 1840s and became particularly popular in France and Britain.

GNOME FIGURE IN SWEDEN

Garden gnomes were further popularised when Sir Frank Crisp, the owner of the second largest collection of garden gnomes in the UK, opened his Friar Park, Henley-on-Thames estate to the public at least once a week from 1910 to 1919. The reputation of German gnomes declined after World War I, but they became popular again in the 1930s following Disney's animated film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, when more working-class people were able to purchase them. World War II and the years following saw a decline in the industry, causing most producers to halt their manufacture.

Garden gnomes saw a resurgence in popularity again in the 1970s with the creation of more humorous types of gnomes.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In 2008, it was estimated that there were 25 million garden gnomes in Germany. A recent trend has introduced miniature gnomes of only a few inches in height.

Garden gnomes are typically male, often bearded, usually with red caps and often have pipes. They are often shown pursuing some leisurely pastimes such as fishing or napping.

There are many different variations of garden gnomes including humorous ones ranging from the light hearted biker or barbecuing gnome to the more sinister, such as one stabbed in the back or wearing an executioner's hood.

Gnomes were banned from the Chelsea Flower Show, as the organisers claimed that they detracted from the garden designs. Gnome enthusiasts accused the organisers of snobbery, and the ban was lifted in 2013.

BRITAIN'S WONKIEST PUB

With a name which belies its distinctive appearance, the result of 19th-century mining subsidence that caused one side of the building to be approximately 4 feet lower than the other it certainly lives up to the name of Britain's wonkiest pub. An optical illusion as, when you walk in, everything is level!!,

GUTTED BY FIRE

The building was originally an 18th-century mill house, converted into a pub in the 1830s. The month after it was closed and sold in July 2023 it was gutted in a fire. The new owners demolished it ignoring instructions of South Staffordshire Council. Criminal charges of arson, with intent to endanger life, have been brought against multiple people. Also the landowner has been issued with an enforcement notice which requires them to reconstruct the building to which an appeal against the order and an offer to relocate the pub has been opposed by campaigners.

OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

The building's leaning walls give rise to optical illusions which includes objects to seemingly roll uphill along the pub's dado rails and bottles appearing to roll upwards along tables. Furniture and fixtures do not appear to hang plumb, including the grand father clock, mounted on a shelf.

View from interior, April 2023



MIDI, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



MIDI, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

COMPANY FINANCES AND OWNERSHIP:

In March 2026 ATE Farms Limited, the company that owns the pub, submitted financial records showing just under **£1.7m in equity**. A move to dissolve the company was dropped after these accounts were filed.

LEGAL STANDOFF & REBUILD ORDER:

South Staffordshire Council's enforcement notice demands the pub be rebuilt brick-by-brick by February 2024. However, an appeal has put this order on hold.

PUBLIC INQUIRY POSTPONED:

A high level public inquiry into the appeal scheduled for March 2025 was postponed following a High Court challenge. A judge ruled the inquiry must wait until the criminal investigation into the arson is finished.

POLICE INVESTIGATION:

Staffordshire Police have confirmed that the investigation into the fire (treated as arson) is ongoing. The six arrested were released under investigation. The file has been sent to the Crown Prosecution Service

CAMPAIGN EFFORTS:

The "Save the Crooked House (Let's Get It Re-Built)" a 37,000 member campaign group is still campaigning for the rebuild, having saved the bricks for the project.

FROM CORNMILL TO PUB

Built in 1765, as a cornmill, it was converted into a pub in 1830 named the Glynne Arms. Subsidence caused by mining in the 1850s caused the building to begin sinking with one end being 4 feet lower than the other; or 15 degrees which led to it known locally as the "Siden House" "siden" for "crooked". In 2002 it was officially renamed the Crooked House .

DEMOLITION

Although strengthened by buttresses by 1904 it was condemned as un-safe and scheduled for demolition in 1940's. In 1957 it was bought by Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries who made the structure safe costing £10,000 (£200,000 in 2024) Fire damaged the roof in 1986 and the brewery renovated it at a cost of £360,000 (£1,000,000 in 2024)

BRICKS RECLAIMED

Put up for sale for £675,000 in March 2023. The buyer was ATE Farms Ltd, a property firm. It was subject to a burglary on 25 June causing over £10,000 worth of damage. In July, Historic England received a request for listed building status. The Georgian Group also examined the suitability of the site for listed status. Members of the public formed the Save the Crooked House group to campaign for the pub's rebuilding. After bricks being taken from the site and sold on social media, the group had the remaining reclaimed bricks locked in secure storage.

Great Stock Exchange Fraud of 1814

Around 1 a.m. on February 21st 1814 a striking figure, near exhaustion, wearing a uniform under a grey great-coat, suggesting he was a military officer who had travelled far, stopped at the Ship Inn. His knocking also attracted the attention of the landlord of the neighbouring Packet Boat public house, who came to establish the cause of the commotion.

DISCOURAGED QUESTIONING

The night porter of the Ship Inn opened the door and, following a conversation, the officer spoke in terms that discouraged further questioning: *'I have this last hour been landed on a beach from France after travelling for two nights and I am the bearer of dispatches that are the most important to be brought to England these past twenty years. I must have horses and in the meantime I would be obliged if you would bring me pen and paper so that I can inform the authorities of what has passed.'* When asked the nature of his news, he waved his interrogator aside: *'Do not pester me with questions. You will know it tomorrow from the Post-Admiral.'*

Mr. Wright, the landlord, was roused, and joined by some guests, one being Mr William St. John, an agent of The Traveller newspaper there to obtain intelligence for the paper on developments in France and any information for his own Stock Exchange dealings.

RECOGNISED AS AN OFFICER

By candle light they recognised he was wearing the uniform of an officer with a number of medals. He also carried a small case. Requesting privacy he said to the landlord: *'I am the bearer of sensational and glorious news – the best that could possibly be wished. But I cannot say more. I must ask you to arrange with great urgency an express horse and rider to carry a message to the Admiral at Deal as well as a post-chaise and four to take me to London. For the present I need pen, paper and ink and I would be obliged if you could also provide some refreshment to sustain me.'*

Exact text of the letter on the right



Caricature of Lord Cochrane made after his conviction for fraud in 1814

He claimed that Napoleon I of France was dead and the Bourbon rule restored. He requested that this information be sent to the Admiralty in London via semaphore telegraph, the fastest method. The imposter then travelled to London, stopping at various inns to spread the news.

THE LETTER SENT POSTHASTE

To the honourable T. Foley Post Admiral Deal Dover, one o'clock am February 21st, 1814

Sir,

I have the honour to acquaint you that the L'Aigle from Calais, Pierre Duquin, Master, has this moment landed me near Dover, to proceed to the capital with dispatches of the happiest nature. I have pledged my honour that no harm shall come to the crew of the L'Aigle; even with a flag of truce they immediately stood for sea. Should they be taken, I have to entreat you immediately to liberate them. My anxiety will not allow me to say more for your gratification than that the allies obtained a final victory; that Bonaparte was overtaken by a party of Sacken's Cossacks, who immediately slaid [sic] him, and divided his body between them. General Platoff saved Paris from being reduced to ashes. The Allied Sovereigns are there, and the white cockade is universal, and immediate peace is certain. In the utmost haste, I entreat your consideration and have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant, R. du Bourg Lieut-Colonel and Aide-

At the same time 3 men, dressed in Bourbon uniforms and posing as French officers, were also seen celebrating in London, proclaiming the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

EFFECT ON STOCK MARKET

Rumours of Napoleon's defeat had been circulating in London but when the imposters news came from Dover circulated among traders at the London Stock Exchange, the value of government securities increased rapidly. Prices dropped back, only to increase on reports of the celebrations of the 3 French officers. But the entire affair proved to be a hoax when in the afternoon, the government confirmed that reports of Napoleon's death and the Bourbon restoration were false causing the relevant stock prices to immediately fall back to their previous levels.

INVESTIGATION

The Stock Exchange Committee launched an investigation and discovered that there had been a sale of more than £1.1 million (£69 million in 2026) of two government-based stocks purchased the previous week. Eight people were eventually convicted of conspiracy to defraud, including Lord Cochrane, a Radical member of Parliament and naval hero, plus his uncle the Hon. Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone, Richard Butt, Lord Cochrane's financial advisor, and Captain Random de Berenger, who had posed as du Bourg and one of the French officers. Six were tried, and sentenced to 12 months prison, with the most prominent also sentenced to the public pillory and fines. (Use of the pillory was abolished in 1837) Lord Cochrane was stripped of his naval rank and expelled from the Order of the Bath and House of Commons. Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone fled the country after hearing the verdict.

CULPABILITY OF LORD COCHRANE

Although convicted of the fraud, he continued to assert his innocence. In 1816, he brought an unsuccessful charge of "partiality, misrepresentation, injustice and oppression" against the presiding judge Lord Ellenborough. Popular opinion backed Cochrane; he was re-elected to the House of Commons and the pillory portion of his sentence was dropped, for fear of public reaction.

THE PILORY & HUMILIATION DEVICES

There have been many type of punishment for a range of crimes and one of the most common in many countries was the pillory—or public humiliation. The pillory was a device usually made of a wood or metal framework erected on a post, with holes for securing the head and hands. Used during the medieval and renaissance periods for punishment by public humiliation and often further physical abuse.

SET UP IN PUBLIC PLACES

Documented in English since 1274 it stems from Old French pelliore and medieval Latin pilloria, perhaps a diminutive of Latin pila 'pillar, stone barrier'. Rather like the lesser punishment of the stocks, it was two hinged boards which enabled the head or various limbs to be locked into position to secure the captive. They were set in marketplaces, and other public places, often on platforms to increase public visibility and with a placard de-tailing their crime.

PUBLIC HUMILIATION

With the main purpose of public humiliation people would gather in the marketplace to taunt, tease and laugh at the offender and often pelt the offender with rotten food, mud, offal, dead animals, and animal excrement. Sometimes this resulted in the person being killed or maimed from being pelted with stones, bricks and other dangerous objects. Related punishments while in the pillory could be shaving off the persons hair, corporal punishment such as flagellation or even permanent mutilation such as branding or having an ear cut off as in the case of John Bastwick.

SCANINAVIAN SHAME POLE

In Scandinavian Protestant cultures the pillory would be the worldly part of a church punishment. The delinquent would first serve the ecclesiastical part of his punishment on the pillory bench in the church itself, and then be handed to the worldly authorities to be bound to the Skampåle "Shame Pole" for public humiliation. Use of the pillory was restricted in England by the Pillory Abolition Act 1816 to punishment for perjury.

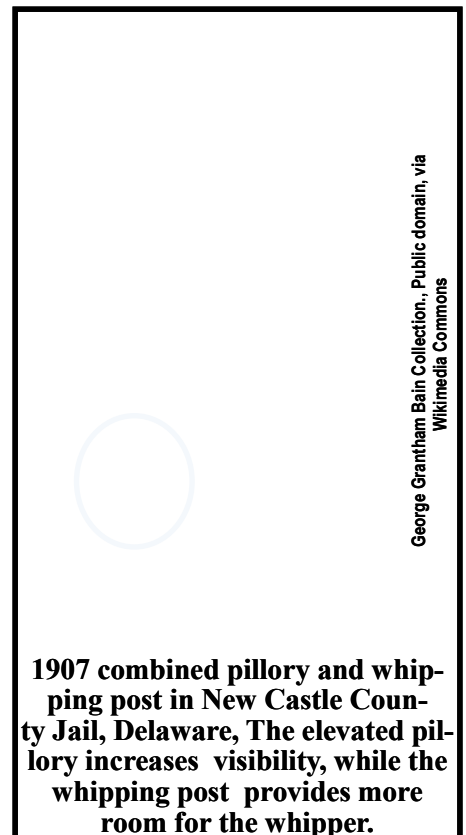


Eyre Crowe, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Daniel Defoe, a journalist, merchant and spy who wrote Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders and Roxana and is seen as one of the earliest proponents of the English novel, also wrote many political tracts, and was consulted by intellectuals and political leaders, got into trouble with the authorities which resulted in spending time in prison. He was pilloried in July 1703 for publishing a satirical pamphlet, The Shortest Way with the Dissenters (1702), deemed "seditious libel". While as a Protestant dissenter, he used satire to mock high-Anglican Tories, but many readers missed the irony and viewed the work as a serious proposal to violently silence religious dissenters. However, when he was sentenced to the pillory in 1703 for seditious libel, he was regarded as a hero by the crowd and was pelted with flowers



18th century stone pillory in Mespelare, Belgium decorated with the coat of arms of the Goubau family, who were lords of the village.



1907 combined pillory and whipping post in New Castle County Jail, Delaware, The elevated pillory increases visibility, while the whipping post provides more room for the whipper.

However, the stocks remained in use, until 1872. The last person to be pilloried in England was Peter James Bossy, who was convicted of "wilful and corrupt perjury" at the Old Bailey in 1830. He was

sentenced to 7 years penal transportation to Van Diemen's Land, 6 months in Newgate prison and one hour in the pillory in the Old Bailey

DRAGONS TAKE YOUR CHOICE!

Stories of dragons are world wide. Did a creature exist? Was it a figment of peoples imagination? If people took sheep to appease St Georges dragon, and they were consumed, was it a local hoax? It is a question to which there is no answer. So the choice of believe or not is up to you!

Friedrich-Johann-Justin-Bertuch, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



MANY COUNTRIES

The legend of Saint George and the Dragon -right- is from the sixth century AD. The earliest artistic representations are from the 11th century. The major version is from the Golden Legend stating the dragon pillaged the Libyan towns sheep and ate the shepherd forcing the people to leave two sheep every morning. Eventually, by lottery they left children; which included a princess. St George saw it and when the dragon arrived he killed it and all the people converted to Christianity.

WAWEL DRAGON BONES

Poland's Wawel Cathedral holds bones -right- rumoured to have belonged to a local dragon. Hanging next to the cathedral's entrance are the claimed "real" bones of the dragon Smok Walewska.

EUROPEAN DRAGON

The Roman poet Virgil in his poem Culex describes a shepherd battling with a big constricting snake, and calls it "draco". In the Middle Ages, the European dragon; left, is depicted as a large, horned, scaly, fire-breathing, lizard-like creature with leathery, bat-like wings. The European dragon, is depicted as a greedy beast only interested in wealth and other valuables.



AnonymousUnknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Firedrakes, below, is Russian: ognennyi zmei, Ukrainian: Vohny- anyy zmiy, "fiery serpent"; Swedish: eldsdrake, "fiery dragon"), among other names, is a European type of dragon, predominantly from Slavic folklore, but also found in Swedish folklore and elsewhere, said to appear as sparking streaks of fire in the sky akin to shooting stars or will-o'-the-wisps. Such are primarily evil beings, more often shape shifted demons or spirits.



AnonymousUnknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

A fiery dragon (meteorite) that fell from the sky in 1091 during Vsevolod Yaroslavich's hunt near Vyshgorod



Yohan euan o4, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

COUNTY DURHAM

The Lambton Worm below is a legend from County Durham. The story takes place around the River Wear, and is one of the area's pieces of folklore, having been adapted from written and oral tradition into pantomime and song formats.



Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

ROMAINIAN

A balaur below in Romanian folklore is a type of many headed dragon or monstrous serpent, sometimes said to be equipped with wings. The number of heads is usually around three, but they can also have seven heads or even twelve heads according to some legends.



I, Alex:D, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

FIREFIGHTING IN ANTARCTICA

Firefighting in remote Antarctica is complicated by the unusual and harsh conditions and the remoteness of the locations to be covered. Also the importance of protecting life-supporting shelter from the results of the destruction by the fire

While due to the terrain and temperatures there are no wildfires in Antarctica, there are different conditions that represents a serious threat to human activity. Two main issues are that because Antarctica is the windiest place on earth the winds are so fierce that they quickly fan any flames. Also water supply, as due to the low temperatures, water, in its fully liquid form is often hard to obtain in large quantity.

Due to the harsh conditions, shelter is a necessity of life and with the significant loss of shelter due to fire, survival of a base's residents is exacerbated by their remoteness from outside aid. This means that bases in Antarctica are specially designed to mitigate the effects of a fire. The major strategy being made up of a number of separate buildings with a significant distance between them.

As further protection against the results of a fire many Antarctic bases store emergency supplies sufficient for base personnel to survive until help can arrive, a distance away so that even a large fire will not affect them. .

ANTARCTIC FIRE DEPARTMENT

Antarctica's only full-time professional fire department, the largest and best equipped is based at McMurdo Station where it maintains two stations. Station 1 is located in central McMurdo operating in the urban centre of the base also as the headquarters while station 2 is located at McMurdo International Airport and serves the station's airfields, Phoenix Airfield, Williams Field and the Ice Runway.

In 2025, the Station 1 fleet consisted of two fire engines, a water tender, an ambulance, a rescue vehicle, and a Self Contained Attack Truck firefighting vehicle. The Station 2 fleet consisted of an ambulance and seven tracked Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting vehicles, to handle the deep snow cover that surrounds the runways.

During the Antarctic summer McMur-



Eli Duke, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

FIRES IN ANTARCTICA

The first recorded station fire in Antarctica was during the British Southern Cross Expedition of 1898–1900, when a candle set fire to a hut and nearly burnt it down, which would have been disastrous to the expedition.

The British Hope Bay Station was completely destroyed by fire in 1948. Two of the 3 staff were killed, the survivor lived in a tent for sixteen days until rescued.

On August 3, 1960, a fire whipped by strong winds struck the Soviet Mirny Station, killing 8.

Another fire on June 21, 2020 there damaged several labs, but no one was injured.

On April 12, 1984, the Argentine leader of the Almirante Brown Base burned the entire base down on purpose to avoid having to stay the winter. There were no injuries and personnel were evacuated by a US Navy ship.

The Comandante Ferraz Antarctic Station fire at Brazil's Comandante Ferraz Antarctic Station on February 25, 2012, destroyed much of the station, materials and equipment used for research. Two people were killed and another injured.

On October 5, 2008, a building at the Russian Progress Station burned down, with one person killed and two seriously injured. Also radio contact with the outside world was lost for a few days.

do has a population of 1,500. During this time, the Antarctic Fire Department maintains a staff of about 55, split between Station 1 and Station 2. In the winter the resident population reduces to about 200 and so the Antarctic Fire Department staffing decreases to match.

As well as fires and fire alarms, the department handles medical calls, hazmat spills, odour investigations, assists, dive emergencies, and other tasks as needed (including herding seals and penguins off runways for incoming flights).

SOUTHERNMOST FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Southernmost Fire Department serves the American South Pole Station which was long the responsibility of a volunteer fire brigade, staffed by station personnel, who receive one week of training. Because of the cold climate, dry chemicals rather than water are usually used to extinguish fires.

In the twenty-first century, a professional contingent of a few firefighters of the Antarctic Fire Department, designated as Station 3, was added to the station for the summer months. Their equipment is a tractor that pulls two modules on sleds, each containing 500 pounds of dry chemical and 600 pounds of foam.

OTHER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Other research stations in Antarctica, 1. Vostok Station (Russia), 2. Scott Base (New Zealand), 3. Terra Nova Station (Italy) Are staffed by part-time fire brigades.

TWO FIRES OF THE GATES OF HELL

YANAR DAGH THE - BURNING MOUNTAIN'-

is a natural gas fire that burns perpetually on a hillside on the Absheron Peninsula near Baku, capital of Azerbaijan where flames rise 3 metres above a thin, porous layer of sandstone.

Fuelled by a continuous seep of gas from beneath the surface the flame burns steadily. Since the first millennium BCE, the fire served as a link between humans and supernatural powers in the Zoroastrian religion. Once common in Azerbaijan, only a few natural fires remain today, with Yanar Dagh being the most notable example. The high concentration of natural gas beneath the Absheron Peninsula has sustained natural flames throughout history, which were documented by historical figures such as Marco Polo.

TEMPLE OF FIRE

Besides Yanar Dagh, the most well-known Azerbaijan site of a similar natural fire is the Fire Temple near Baku, located on the outskirts of the Greater Caucasus. This religious site, known as an Ateshgah, meaning "temple of fire", holds historical significance in fire-worship traditions. Similar to the flames of Yanar Dagh, the fire at the Ateshgah of Baku was originally a natural phenomenon resulting from the seepage of natural gas through porous strata. However,



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The Door to Hell, a burning natural gas field in Derweze, Turkmenistan. roughly the size of two basketball courts

the natural gas flow at Ateshgah ceased some time ago, and the flames now visible there are sustained by a gas main, while the flames at Yanar Dagh continue to burn naturally. According to local accounts, the Yanar Dagh flame was discovered in the 1950s when it was accidentally ignited by a shepherd.

THE DARVAZA GAS CRATER

Door to Hell or Gates of Hell, officially the Shining of Karakum, is a burning natural gas field collapsed into a cavern near Darvaza, Turkmenistan with hundreds of small natural gas fires illuminating the floor and rim of the crater. Drilling in 1971 punctured a natural-gas cavern, and its roof collapsed. But some sources state that engineers ignited the crater to prevent poisonous gases from spreading. In the middle of the Karakum Desert it has a diameter of 60–70 metres and a depth of 30 metres. Another nearby gas crater is fenced off and has a distinct odour. Relevant records are absent and some local geologists have claimed

that the collapse of a crater happened in the 1960s and it was set on fire only in the 1980s to prevent the emission of poisonous gases. Others assert that the site was drilled by Soviet engineers in 1971 as an oil field but collapsed within days, forming the crater, with the engineers choosing to flare the crater to prevent the emission of poisonous gases but underestimating the volume of the gas controlling the burn

In January 2022, plans were announced to extinguish the crater, but despite the intentions, the crater remains open and burning.

George Kourounis,
In 2013, George Kourounis became the first person to set foot at the bottom of the crater to gather soil samples for the Extreme Microbiome Project. The descent was sponsored by National Geographic and featured in an episode of the National Geographic Channel series Die Trying. Kourounis used a custom-made Kevlar harness and multiple Technora ropes attached to a full-body aluminised suit with a self-contained breathing apparatus. He has since wished to descend into the crater again, carrying more equipment for better profiling of the local biome. In an Interview with National Geographic he said
I describe it as a coliseum of fire—everywhere you look it's thousands of these small fires. The sound was like that of a jet engine, this roaring, high-pressure, gas-burning sound. And there was no smoke. It burns very cleanly, so there's nothing to obscure your view. You can just see every little lick of flame.

YANAR DAGH -BURNING MOUNTAIN'



Frokor, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

20,000 holy rats and the Karni Mata Temple

Karni Mata Temple of Deshnoke, also known as Madh Deshnoke, is 30 km south of Bikaner, in Rajasthan and has become the most important pilgrimage site for devotees of Charani sagatis after access to Hinglaj was restricted following the partition of India. It is also a popular destination for tourists and pilgrims and is renowned, as the "Temple of Rats" due to the 20,000 rodents, known as k̄abā, and considered holy are treated with utmost care by devotees.

HINDU ETHOS

This is sometimes upheld as an example an "environmentally conscious Hindu ethos" which views nature as sacred, and divine which emphasises reverence for all life forms, promoting a lifestyle of minimal consumption and non-violence to ensure that human actions harmonise with the cosmic order. Originally constituted around 1530, after the Maharajan of Karni Mata the inner sanctum covered by the dome has grown with added construction over the centuries.

THE HOLY K̄ABĀ

Karni Mata; a revered 14th-15th century female Hindu sage and mystic, who, while she remained celibate organised for her younger sister to be married to Depaji, to perpetuate the continuation of his line. They had four sons. The youngest, Lakshman.



Jakub Hatun, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Karniji was drowned in nearby Kolayat while bathing. Her younger sister pleaded to Karni Mata to bring Lakshman back to life. Karni Mata carried the boy's body to the inner sanctum, closed the doors, and said not to open them.

THE GOD OF DEATH

She went to the god of death, Yamraj, and demanded for Lakshman to be returned to life. But the god of death queried, "if so, how will the cycle of rebirth work? By what law will it move?" Karni Mata thus declared that her family will live wherever I live. When they die, they will stay with me. Karni Mata chose the embodied form of the k̄abā (rat) so that when human Charanas from her lineage die, they will be reborn as k̄abā and live near her in the temple. They will again be reborn as human Charanas. .

HOME TO 20,000 RATS

The temple complex is home to 20,000 k̄abā -rats, cared for by the temple's staff who consider them as kin. They reside throughout the inner temple complex. In each space, different food items is left for them so the k̄abā have access to a rich variety of resources and are provided protection from predators (cats, etc.) The k̄abā lie in the devotees' laps or perch on their shoulders while they are sitting in the temple. They eat from the hands of visitors and from the same (plate) as the workers in the kitchen. Eating food that has been nibbled on by the k̄abā is considered to be a "high honour". Temple rules state that if you accidentally kill one of the rats you must replace it one made of silver or gold.

HOLY WHITE RATS

Of the thousands of k̄abā rats in the temple, there are a few white k̄abā, which are considered especially holy as they are considered to be the manifestations of Karni Mata herself and her four nephews. Sighting them is considered a special blessing and visitors put in extensive efforts to bring them forth, offering prasada, a sweet holy food. The current Head Priest is chosen from the lineage of Karni Mata, i.e. a Depavat. He is elected to serve the duty determined through a rotating list held by the temple administration. He is the only individual who can enter the innermost sanctum (garbhagriha) where Karni Mata's sacred image is housed and is unable to leave the temple boundaries during his month-long role living day and night in the temple with the k̄abā during his tenure,



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