Serpent of the Nile
CLEOPATRA
How a poisonous power struggle & doomed love affair sealed the fate of Egypt's goddess queen
Was William Shakespeare born early enough to enjoy the delights of a cup of tea? And did he wear a Top Hat?

Britain’s first Prime Minister was surely at a later date...

...but was that before or after the Great Fire of London?

Each turn you place one of your cards where you think it goes in the Timeline before turning it over to see if you are right. There is only one goal - correctly play all of your cards!

This game contains 110 British History themed cards and can be combined with the cards from other Timeline sets.

EXPLORE THE TIMELINE GAMES RANGE:

www.findyourgamestore.co.uk
"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold, Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that The winds were love-sick with them"

Shakespeare's sumptuous description of Cleopatra's voyage to meet Mark Antony is one of the most famous scenes in literature, based on an account by the ancient biographer Plutarch. Clearly this first impression made an impact – as soon as the enigmatic pharaoh stepped ashore, the Roman general was infatuated. Thus began the infamous tragedy of Ancient Egypt's power couple – murder, seduction and betrayal. Read all about their fascinating story and uncover the truth about Cleopatra's dramatic death on page 32.

Speaking of death, we also delve into the morbid and macabre world of the Victorians. It's perfect winter-time reading, especially as telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve was once as traditional as a roast goose. If you get spooked, you can flick to our festive-themed front section, as we unwrap the origins of Santa and more. From all the team, happy holidays!

Welcome

Editor's picks

Inside a Tudor banquet
One peek at Henry VIII's dinner menu might leave you with chronic indigestion. The people of the court would eat up to 5,000 calories a day!

Hitler's British fangirl
The antics of the aristocratic siblings, the Mitfords, are more shocking than any soap opera. Discover how they became the talk of 1930s society.

The last of the Medici
What a way for one of history's most powerful families to end – with a debauched, drunken grand duke who couldn't care less about leaving an heir.

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Uncover the Medieval sect that unleashed holy terror

78 Last of the Medici
Inside the depraved world of Italy’s grand duke and the dynasty that died with him

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A mother and child take a stroll during a gas exercise in Kingston Upon Thames in Surrey, England, circa 1941. The authorities used tear gas so that civilians could become familiar with using their masks in an emergency. Rehearsals like this were held throughout the country as the government expected attacks from enemy planes. Fortunately, no poison gas bombs were dropped on Britain.

c.1941
On 20 November 1947, then Princess Elizabeth and Philip Mountbatten, duke of Edinburgh, were married at Westminster Abbey in front of 2,000 guests and 200 million radio listeners around the world. The newlyweds honeymooned at Broadlands, the Mountbatten estate in Hampshire, where they are pictured here, enjoying a stroll, three days later. 2016 marks their 69th wedding anniversary.
A VERY ‘MERRY’ CHRISTMAS

An era of national Prohibition in the USA came to an end on 5 December 1933. The ban on alcoholic beverages began in 1920 in a bid to restore religious virtues and purge society of crime. In fact, this period saw the rise of gangsters and speakeasies. When the 18th Amendment was repealed, the control of liquor laws were returned to the states. This photo shows men and women celebrating on Park Avenue.
BUILDING THE ISS

Taken on 10 December 1997, this underwater image shows astronauts Jerry Ross and Jim Newman training for a spacewalk they will perform when they begin assembly of the International Space Station in July 1998. The ISS was so large that it had to be taken into space piece by piece and built in orbit. Ross and Newman are in a new giant swimming pool-type facility at the Johnson Space Center.
Untold stories of the world’s greatest monarchs

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From Saturnalia to Santa, uncover the origins and amazing stories behind beloved modern traditions.

ALL ABOUT

CHRISTMAS

From Saturnalia to Santa, uncover the origins and amazing stories behind beloved modern traditions.
### Christmas across history

Pagans, puritans and poets have all had a part to play in the story of this Christian winter festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd Century BCE</th>
<th>1st Century</th>
<th>4th Century</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAGANS CELEBRATE SATURNALIA</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHRISTIANITY TAKES HOLD</strong></td>
<td><strong>A DATE IS CHOSEN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pagan Romans celebrate the winter solstice with feasts, gifts and decorations in a festival called Saturnalia. Centuries later, this may be the inspiration for a Christian festival also held at the end of December.</td>
<td>Pagan traditions start to be abandoned as Christianity spreads throughout the Roman Empire. However, Jesus’s birth date remains a mystery, as it is not mentioned in the Bible.</td>
<td>By studying the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Roman scholars estimate that Jesus was conceived on 25 March. As a result, the Roman Church decides on 25 December as Jesus’s birth date.</td>
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| **GIFTS ARE GIVEN** | **TWELFTH NIGHT GAINS POPULARITY** | **WASHINGTON CROSSES THE DELAWARE RIVER** |
| Giving presents at Christmas becomes popular in the Victorian era. Shops start arranging Christmas-themed displays in the 1820s and newspapers print Christmas gift advertisements by the 1840s. | Twelfth Night is celebrated with games, disguises and an elaborate cake. Whoever finds a bean in their slice of cake is selected as the ‘Lord of Misrule’ and is in charge of the festivities. | 2,400 soldiers are led by George Washington in an attack. The temperature during the crossing was -30°C. Hessians are captured, having been caught off guard during Christmas festivities. |

| **EARLY 19TH CENTURY** | **18TH CENTURY** | **1840s** |
| **THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CARD** | **AMERICANS EMBRACE CHRISTMAS** | **SANTA CLAUS BECOMES ICONIC** |
| Sir Henry Cole commissions an artist to create a seasonal greetings card that he can send to all his acquaintances, saving himself hours of writing individual letters by hand. | 34 short stories written by Washington Irving describe Christmas as a good-natured, peaceful festival, influencing many American customs. | Drawing on an 1822 poem by Clement Clarke Moore, political cartoonist Thomas Nast creates what will become the iconic image of Santa Claus - a bearded, jolly figure carrying a sack of presents. |

Postage rates were lowered in the 1840s, helping popularise the sending of Christmas cards. 20% of Americans have a Christmas tree by 1900. The year Christmas is declared a federal holiday. 1870.
THE FIRST NATIVITY SCENE
Saint Francis of Assisi creates the first nativity scene in Greccio, Italy, to help tell the story of Jesus’s birth. He uses a live ox and ass and sets up a manger filled with hay.

Christmas Trees Come Inside
Evergreen boughs have been used as decoration for many centuries, but in the 16th century, German Christians begin bringing entire trees into their homes for the Christmas celebrations.

Christmas Is Cancelled
Puritan Parliamentarians such as Oliver Cromwell disapprove of how extravagant Christmas has become in Britain, and ban feasts and other celebrations. This continues until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

The Queen FAVOURS Goose
After the victory over the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth I decrees that everyone should eat goose at their Christmas feasts. However, only the wealthy are able to afford this luxury for their table.

The Queen FAVOURS Goose
Elizabeth I preferred goose for celebrations because it was what she ate after the defeat of the Spanish fleet.

Turkey Tradition Begins
Turkey becomes much more widely available in the 1950s, so it is no longer restricted to the plates of wealthy families. The custom of eating turkey on Christmas Day is established.

Augustine Arrives In England
A Benedictine monk named Augustine is sent to Britain by Pope Gregory I to convert Anglo-Saxons, Christianity spreads throughout England, bringing the customs of Christmas with it.

Christmas Day Truce
Five months into World War I – when many expected that the war would be over by Christmas – an unofficial truce is called at the Western Front in order to mark Christmas Day. British and German soldiers meet in no-man’s land.

Turkey becomes much more widely available in the 1950s, so it is no longer restricted to the plates of wealthy families. The custom of eating turkey on Christmas Day is established.

The height of the tree Norway donates to Britain as a token of its gratitude.

The number of days it takes to dig a hole in Trafalgar Square big enough for the tree to sit in.

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In the 1843 novel A Christmas Carol, Scrooge gives Bob Cratchit a turkey to replace his goose for Christmas Day.
**Hall of Fame**

**MODERN CHRISTMAS HEROES**

Meet the saints, royals, artists and inventors who shaped the festive traditions that make a very merry Christmas.

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**CHARLES II**  **BRITISH**  **1603–85**

In 1644, a law banning the celebration of Christmas was passed in England. At the time, parliament was dominated by Puritans, who believed that popular Christmas activities such as drinking, dancing and overindulgence were sinful and superfluous to Christian beliefs. 16 years later, after the death of Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell, the ban was lifted by the new king, Charles II. Gradually, several much-loved Christmas traditions were revived and the festive spirit spread across the nation once again.

---

**QUEEN CHARLOTTE**  **GERMAN**  **1744–1818**

Adorned with candles, fruit, sweets and toys, the first Christmas tree was truly something to behold. The spectacular yew tree, which had been set up inside Queen's Lodge at Windsor Castle, was the idea of Queen Charlotte, who wanted to lay on a special treat for a children's party at her home. The tradition of bringing yew branches inside at Christmas was well-established in Germany by the 17th century, but when Charlotte came to England in 1761, she brought the custom with her. For the party in 1800, she upgraded the branch to an entire tree, and soon all the upper-class families copied her.

---

**HADDON SUNDBLOM**  **AMERICAN**  **1899–1976**

The jolly, rosy-cheeked, bearded Santa Claus recognised worldwide today was first created by Haddon Sundblom. The illustrator was commissioned by Coca-Cola to create an image for the company's 1931 Christmas advert, and took inspiration from the description of Saint Nick in Clement Clark Moore's poem *Twas The Night Before Christmas*. Some claim that Sundblom was the first to dress Santa in red, the colour of the Coca-Cola logo, but earlier depictions already featured the now-famous red coat. Sundblom continued to illustrate Santa for the company until 1964, and images based on his creations are still used in adverts today.

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**IRVING BERLIN**  **AMERICAN**  **1888–1989**

The dulcet tones of Bing Crosby’s *White Christmas* were first heard in 1942, and the song has since become the bestselling single of all time. Legendary composer Irving Berlin wrote the record for Crosby to sing in the movie *Holiday Inn*, but the track’s melancholy feel stems from his grief at losing his three-week-old son on Christmas Day. It struck a chord with World War II soldiers in particular, and has gone on to sell more than 50 million copies worldwide.
POPE JULIUS I  ITALIAN  UNKNOWN-352
In the 4th century, church officials made the decision that Christians should celebrate the anniversary of Jesus's birth, but there was a slight problem: no one knew the date on which he was actually born. As a clever marketing ploy, Pope Julius I picked 25 December, the date on which the Roman pagan festival Saturnalia came to a spectacular end. By choosing this date, the church was able to merge the two celebrations, which they hoped would increase the chances of converting the population to Christianity.

HENRY COLE  BRITISH  1808-82
In December 1843, successful entrepreneur Henry Cole was dreading the thought of responding to the stack of Christmas letters in his letterbox. His popularity and the expansion of the British postal system meant he had received more than ever, and he simply didn't have time to write a response to them all. To solve his problem, he commissioned artist JC Horsley to produce a seasonal image depicting a festive family feast and people helping the poor, then had 1,000 copies printed with a Christmas message. A few decades later, the tradition caught on.

SAINT NICHOLAS  GREEK  270-343
The original bringer of gifts and inspiration for Santa Claus was the bishop of Myra, in what is now Turkey. As the patron saint of many different groups, including children, his legend lived on, with stories of his acts of charity spreading across Europe. His reputation as a magical gift bringer was particularly celebrated in the Netherlands, where he was known as ‘Sinterklaas’. Every 6 December, the date of his death, would be marked with a feast and presents, a tradition the Dutch took to the New World.

“I've just written the best song I ever wrote... the best song anybody ever wrote”
Irving Berlin on White Christmas

SAINT FRANCIS  OF ASSISI  ITALIAN  C.1182-1226
The very first nativity scene was established by Roman Catholic preacher Saint Francis when he visited the Italian village of Grecio in 1223. Realising the village chapel was too small to hold the entire congregation for Midnight Mass, he set up the altar in a cave near the village square instead. He also brought along a hay-filled manger and live ox and ass to help him tell the story of Jesus's birth.

CHARLES DICKENS  BRITISH  1812-70
Although the festive season was celebrated long before the release of A Christmas Carol in 1843, many credit its author, Charles Dickens, with making the holiday fashionable again. Outraged by the conditions faced by Britain’s poor in the early-19th century, Dickens originally set out to write a political pamphlet, but instead penned a story about the mean-hearted Scrooge and his path to redemption. The book was a hit, and helped promote goodwill and festive cheer.

TOM SMITH  BRITISH  1823-69
As he threw a log onto the fire and heard it crackle, confectioner Tom Smith was struck with inspiration. The sale of his ‘bonbon’ sweets - sugar almonds wrapped in tissue paper - had recently fallen, but he knew a crackle or pop would add more excitement. Inside each parcel, he placed a strip of paper covered with chemicals that, as the wrapper was opened, created a friction-induced noise. Smith’s crackers were a booming success.

Saint Nicholas was believed to have resurrected three boys who had been dismembered and pickled by an innkeeper.
5 amazing facts about...

THE CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE

AN UNOFFICIAL CEASEFIRE IN WWI WESTERN FRONT, 24 DECEMBER 1914 – 1 JANUARY 1915

01 Carols were sung across the battlefield
On Christmas Eve, British soldiers in the frontline trenches heard German soldiers singing carols including Silent Night. The British responded with a rendition of O Come All Ye Faithful, and the Germans sang the same song back in Latin. Eventually, across the sector, the two sides warily met in the middle of no-man’s land.

02 The sworn enemies exchanged gifts
After shaking hands, the sides gave each other gifts, which took different forms across the front. Food and drink were popular choices including chocolate, plum pudding and plenty of alcohol. Rumours abounded of a pig roast while cigarettes and clothing items were also exchanged. One British soldier even had his hair cut by a German barber.

03 The ceasefire was a chance to bury the dead
While some soldiers happily mingled, others adopted another Christmas message of compassion and used the temporary truces to bury dead soldiers who had lay on the ground for weeks. Many ceasefires began after simple requests to bury comrades, and in many cases, soldiers from both sides helped each other to carry out this task.

04 They played a friendly football match
The most famous part of the truce was a reputed encounter in which British and German soldiers played a game of football, with the Germans apparently winning 3-2. Some have argued the event never took place, but there is enough evidence to suggest that there was at least several small-scale ‘kick-abouts’ along the Western Front between the two sides.

05 The last witness died in 2005
The last recorded person who could remember the truce was a Scotsman in the Black Watch called Alfred Anderson. Aged 18 in 1914, Anderson didn’t fraternise with Germans, but he recalled the cessation of gunfire: “I remember the eerie sound of silence. We shouted ‘Merry Christmas’, even though nobody felt merry. It was a short peace in a terrible war.”

AT A GLANCE

At the end of 1914, a miracle occurred. Amid the carnage of trench warfare, German and primarily British soldiers put down their arms and celebrated Christmas as friends, not warring nations. All fell quiet on the Western Front as perhaps 100,000 troops took part in a fleeting moment of humanity and peace.
The price of a mile
New exhibition now open
Banquets provided the perfect opportunity for Henry VIII to showcase his wealth and impress his visitors with a variety of lavish courses and delicacies. Banquets were as much about display as they were about the quality of food on offer, and the king often hosted them when he was entertaining foreign or important guests. As such, they were regarded as special occasions, and thus for the majority of the time, Henry dined in relative privacy.

All of the preparation for a royal banquet took place in the kitchens under the supervision of the clerk. The kitchens at Hampton Court Palace were so vast that they accounted for a third of the whole palace, and on a normal day fed at least 600 people twice a day. The master cooks were responsible for preparing all of the food, and had a team of about 200 people working under them. Henry VIII’s most famous cook was the French Piero le Doux, who impressed the king so much that he made several costly gifts to him. By far the least desirable job was that of the turnspit, who had the unenviable task of turning all of the meat on spits over a fire for hours on end.

Meals began by diners washing their hands in special fingerbowls, and this would be repeated between courses. Napkins were also used, and good table manners were compulsory. People generally ate with a knife and their fingers, while spoons were used for liquids. The king also owned two-pronged forks. The food was served with great ceremony and dishes were carried into the banquet in procession. There would be many courses, and as such a typical banquet could last for several hours. The amount of food the court consumed at a banquet was staggering: it was not unusual for the king and members of court to eat between 4,500 and 5,000 calories a day, much of which came from meat.

Salads or ‘sallats’ started to become popular during Henry’s reign, and often consisted of an assortment of vegetables. These were usually cooked, and included onion, leek, carrot, parsnip, lettuce, cucumber, and cabbage. Herbs and flowers such as violets were sometimes added, and the salads would then be dressed with oil, vinegar or sugar. Salads were often elaborately served, with the vegetables carved into shapes.

Cheese
Cheese was frequently served at the end of a meal and was thought to close the stomach. It came in three varieties: hard, soft and green. Soft cheese, made of whole milk, was the cheese enjoyed by the nobility. However, the king and his court often consumed so much food that they rarely had room for this final dish, and as such it was often untouched.

Pies
Henry VIII was a great lover of pies, and they could be made in all different varieties, both sweet and savoury; one of the king’s favourite was actually orange pie. On occasion, they were filled with live birds, which flew away when the pie was cut. Pies were encased in a thick pastry, known as a ‘coffin’. This part was not eaten, and was merely intended as a holder for the contents within.

Marchpane
As the 16th century progressed, so too did the penchant for sugar, which was extremely expensive. Marchpane, a type of marzipan, was a common feature at banquets. The royal chefs began to think of elaborate ways of constructing edible decorations. At a banquet held at Greenwich Palace in 1528, a marchpane of “a dungeon and a manor place” was prepared.
Fruit was often cooked rather than served raw, and the king liked it served in tarts and jellies. Many fruits were also turned into preserves; citrus fruits were costly, and Henry's favourite was a quince marmalade that was so thick it could be sliced. People often gave fruit as gifts: strawberries and cherries were among Henry's favourites, and often graced the table of his banquets.

Swan
No Tudor banquet was complete without a magnificent centrepiece, and swan was a popular choice—Henry VIII's court once ate seven in a day! It would have been roasted before being redressed in its splendid feathers, and its beak may even have been gilded. Other popular centrepiece choices were peacocks, and at Christmas a boar's head. Meat was the main constituent of the Tudor diet, and although there would be a selection of vegetables and salads, the main ingredients at Tudor banquets were protein based.

Fish
Fish was eaten on Fridays and during Lent, and was supplied from the palaces' fish ponds. It was also served at banquets, and Henry VIII enjoyed salmon in particular. A huge variety of fish and seafood was available, including pike, turbot, carp, lobster and oysters, which were cheap and available in large quantities. Seal and porpoise were seen as great delicacies, and Catherine of Aragon seems to have had a penchant for porpoise. Occasionally, dolphin was also served.

Venison
Henry VIII was an enthusiastic hunter, and the day's kill would often be served at a banquet. Venison was a luxury food item, and was also frequently given as a gift by both royalty and aristocracy. It was regularly supplied to the royal kitchens from the royal hunting parks, and could be served in a variety of ways: as well as being spit roasted in the kitchens alongside other meat, it was often made into pies and pasties.

Manchet loaves
Another common feature at a Tudor banquet was bread, supplied by the palace bakehouse. The type of bread served varied according to rank: wheat was considered to be the finest grain, and bread made from this was expensive. Manchet loaves were small and white, and were made primarily for the king and the most senior members of the court. The yeoman baker for the king's mouth, John Wynkell, prepared the king's manchet loaves.

Wine
Although ale was more commonly consumed in Tudor England, wine was the drink of the royal family and the aristocracy. It had to be imported from Europe and was extremely expensive, and so was classed as a luxury item. The king spent heavily on wine, and all of the royal palaces had their own wine cellars: the one at Hampton Court could hold 300 casks.

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TOP HAT
A SMART HAT FOR A RICH MAN’S POSTMAN
Before the invention of the Penny Black in 1840, post was only really affordable for the wealthy elite. Particularly in London, letter carriers had to look as smart as their customers, so a fur top hat was issued as part of the uniform in 1793.

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
IT’S ALL IN THE DETAILS
Before uniforms were universally distributed to letter carriers, all workers were required to wear brass buttons engraved with the king’s arms and an identification number. When the uniform was rolled out, however, these buttons were replaced with embroidered details on the collar, reading ‘GPO’ and their number.

BRIGHT COAT
LADIES SWOONED AT THE SIGHT
Harking back to Britain’s dominance over its empire, the new General Post Office (GPO) uniform echoed the mid-17th to 19th-century military uniform, a symbol of power and authority. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the uniform proved popular with women, rivals the widespread appeal of the policeman’s attire, prompting one conservative periodical to demand its abolition.

CHRISTMAS CARDS
SEASON’S GREETINGS DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR
With the popularity of Christmas soaring under Queen Victoria’s reign, the idea of sending season’s greetings via post became a reality. In 1843 – just three years after the stamp’s invention made post available to the masses – Henry Cole commissioned the first-ever run of Christmas cards, illustrated by JC Horsley.

THE RED-BREASTED ROBIN
THE LETTER CARRIER AND HIS TRUSTY SIDEKICK, ROBIN
An ‘uncanny’ likeness was picked up on between the letter carrier’s scarlet coat and the red breast of Britain’s favourite bird at the time, the robin. Therefore, Victorian letter carriers quickly earned a nickname after their winged friends, as their presence at most houses was just as welcome as that of the bird.

SCRUFFY TROUSERS
CIVIL SERVANT ON THE TOP, PEASANT ON THE BOTTOM
While the coat, waistcoat and hat might have been supplied as part of a uniform, the letter carrier had to provide his own trousers. They were expected to wear grey trousers, and often the contrast between the quality of the coat and the trousers was laughable.
How to CELEBRATE SATURNALIA

HAILED AS THE FORERUNNER TO CHRISTMAS, THE ROMANS LIKED TO PUT ON THIS SPECTACULAR PARTY IN MIDWINTER ANTIQUE ROMAN EMPIRE, 217 BCE – 448

Named after Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture, Saturnalia originated as a farming festival at the end of the sowing season. As the celebration evolved, 17 December came to signify the beginning of a seven-day festival of Roman hedonism, culminating on the midwinter solstice that was 23 December. The pagan festival truly was a celebration of misrule, where social order was turned on its head. All executions were cancelled and no war was to be declared. Instead, a sacrifice was made to Saturn and enormous feasts were held in his honour. Homes were decorated, gifts exchanged, and everyone was encouraged to have a thoroughly good time.

Cómo celebrar Saturnalia

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Visit the Temple of Saturn

Crowds gather at the Temple of Saturn to witness the unbinding of the statue’s feet. For the rest of the year, woolen bonds wrap Saturn’s feet but during Saturnalia they are cut, signifying the freedom of the festival. Sacrifices to the god are also made, and after this follows a public feast where revellers eat, drink and be merry.

Free your slaves

Saturnalia is a celebration of freedom, and therefore all social hierarchy is lost for the duration. Present your slaves with the traditional felt hat of a freeman (called a ‘pilleum’) and make merry with them as equals for the seven days of celebrations. The roles are reversed and it is now your job to serve them food.

“Io Saturnalia!”

The Saturnalia greeting, exchanged like “merry Christmas”, was often heard as worshippers left the Temple of Saturn.

Deck the halls

Homes were decorated with wreaths of greenery – thought to symbolise life in the dark nights of mid-December.

Legal gambling

During Saturnalia, any form of gambling is totally legal. Bets can be put on for the whole of the seven-day festival.

Relaxed dress

Men could ditch the traditional conservative toga for a more relaxed, brightly coloured tunic, known as ‘synthesis’, meaning ‘put together’.

Bare it all

Naked dancing and singing in the streets is encouraged, as during Saturnalia, “All things that are serious are barred.”
How not to... celebrate Saturnalia

In December 63 BCE, while the rest of Rome was feasting, singing and drinking their way through the annual seven-day romp that was Saturnalia, a plot to overthrow Rome was under way. It had begun in October, when consul Marcus Tullius Cicero was roused from his bed by news that a plot against Rome and Caesar was imminent, led by aristocrat Lucius Sergius Catilina. Once Cicero was informed, he made a series of speeches denouncing Catilina. These inflammatory remarks sparked the resolution to assassinate Cicero. Under the cover of Saturnalia chaos, 12 fires were to be set and, in the confusion, Cicero would be murdered in his home. However, the rebels had been betrayed and this information reached Cicero before the Saturnalia parties began. The conspirators were caught and executed, and Catiline was killed in battle, ending the Conspiracy of Catiline.

03 Elect a 'king of misrule'
Play a game of dice to select a 'king of misrule'. Whoever wins (even if it is a slave – remember, they are free men for Saturnalia) gets to be the king and set a series of silly tasks that the rest of the party must take part in. These tasks can include cork bobbing, singing, dancing and being thrown into cold water.

04 Prepare a feast
Have your servants prepare a marvellous feast to celebrate the festival, complete with a gilded centrepiece (although you must serve it to them). Ensure that Saturn dines with you by seating his effigy at the table. This is called 'lecisternium'. Or, if you’re really lucky, accept an invitation to someone else’s marvellous Saturnalia shindig.

05 Go forth and gamble
During the festival, all gambling laws are relaxed. Therefore, you can partake in games at your leisure and openly in public, along with the many other frivolities to be enjoyed like naked and drunken singing, dancing and clapping. Children are also allowed to join in the gambling, using nuts as currency to bet with.

06 Exchange gifts
The last day of the festival is known as ‘Sigillaria’ and is for the exchanging of small gifts and trinkets. You can buy these from various vendors and they are usually little figurines of people and faces made from pottery or wax. You can also give small white candles, called ‘cerei’, to loved ones, and look forward to receiving your own gifts.

4 FAMOUS... SATURNALIA COMMENTATORS

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA
125-180 GREECE
In Lucian’s poem Saturnalia, the god Saturn exclaims, “During my week the serious is barred: no business allowed.”

PLINY THE YOUNGER
61 CE – C.113, ITALY
A Saturnalia ‘humbug’, Pliny escaped festivities. “I neither interrupt their amusement nor they my studies,” he wrote.

GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS
C.84-54 BCE, ITALY
Poet Catullus was an enjoyer of the Saturnalia festivities, calling it in one of his works, “the best of days.”

LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECa
4 BCE – 62 CE, ITALY
Also not approving of the revelry, Seneca described it as a “mob out of control in pleasantries.”
FINDING FESTIVE SPIRIT ON THE FRONT LINE

A WWII SOLDIER ON CHRISTMAS DAY, WORLDWIDE, 1939-45

For some soldiers it was just another day of fear and bloodshed, but for others Christmas Day provided a brief but welcome distraction from the horrors of war. Lasting for six Christmases, World War II was the most geographically widespread conflict in history, as major Allied Powers such as Britain, France and Russia did battle with the major Axis Powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. Separated from their family and friends, many servicemen marked the day with traditions that reminded them of home, helping to spread a little cheer among their battle-worn comrades.

ATTEND A RELIGIOUS SERVICE

Christian soldiers on all fronts would normally try to mark Christmas with a religious service, typically Midnight Mass, which would be held just before midnight on Christmas Eve. Even some prisoners of war were permitted to have a service. However, those celebrating in churches had to make do without bell ringing, as it could be mistaken for the signalling of an invasion.

DECORATE THE TREE

Many servicemen saw Christmas as an opportunity to get creative, decorating their camps to make them feel more festive and homely. With very few materials to hand, they often had to improvise, making Christmas trees out of whatever foliage they could find and using ration tins, foil wrappings, surgical cotton wool and cigarette cartons to decorate them.

A VISIT FROM SANTA

In an attempt to spread some festive cheer in the army camps, some servicemen took it upon themselves to deliver packages to their comrades while dressed as Santa Claus. Although the costumes were often makeshift and the sleigh was an army truck or tank, it typically worked at putting a smile on soldiers’ faces.
OPEN PRESENTS

Despite the distance and sheer volume of mail, post services did their best to deliver the soldiers their presents from home. In the USA, families were advised to post gifts by 15 October to ensure arrival on Christmas Day, and each package was limited to two kilograms in weight. Popular presents included warm socks, sweets and cigarettes.

PREPARE FOR COMBAT

Ever since the 1914 Christmas Day truce of World War I, which saw enemy soldiers put fighting temporarily on hold, such activity had been banned by many army generals. Therefore, all World War II soldiers had to remain ready for conflict throughout Christmas celebrations, with some missing out on any kind of festive fun altogether.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

Although many traditional Christmas foods were rationed (like ham and sugar), or considered too expensive (as was the case with turkey), army kitchens would still try to provide a proper Christmas dinner for soldiers on the front lines. This often meant that turkey was scarce for those back home, leaving families to make do with chicken or rabbit for their festive meal.

SING CAROLS

Singing Christmas carols was a favourite tradition brought from home, as lyrics about ‘peace on Earth’ helped to lift the soldiers’ spirits. Sometimes the latest Christmas chart hits were sung too, with Bing Crosby’s White Christmas and I’ll Be Home For Christmas proving particularly popular. The melancholy, nostalgia and hopeful messages of these songs really resonated with the troops.

PERFORM A PANTOMIME

To entertain their fellow servicemen, some soldiers would put on humorous pantomimes at their army camps. There are even stories of prisoners of war staging performances for their fellow detainees, as a method of providing a brief escape from their captive lives. These shows were even supported by the prison guards, who believed it would distract the prisoners from trying to escape.
How to make...
MINC’D PYES
THE CLASSIC CHRISTMAS TREATS EUROPE, 1700s

Ingredients
For the pastry:
- 900 grams flour
- 4 tablespoons salt
- 200 grams lard
- 300 millilitres water
- 120 millilitres milk
For the filling:
- 500 grams neat’s tongue
- 900 grams beef suet
- 5 pippins
- 1 green lemon
- 30 grams sweet spice (clove, mace, nutmeg, cinnamon, sugar & salt)
- 500 grams sugar
- 900 grams currants
- 280 millilitres sack
- Orange flower water to taste
- 3 citron lemons

METHOD
01 First make your pastry. Heat the lard, milk and water until boiling. Meanwhile sift the flour and salt together into a bowl and make a well in the centre. Pour the hot liquid into the well and beat quickly to form a soft dough.
02 Knead your dough gently and then cut off a quarter to reserve for the pie lids. Press the dough into mince pie tins (you can find festive shaped ones online - you'll need to get your head out of the Medieval kitchen for this part).
03 Begin making the filling by preparing the tongue. This is traditionally from a cow and you can get it from your local butcher. Parboil it, shred it and then set aside.
04 Prepare the rest of your ingredients: core and dice the pippins (these are sweet apples of your choice), zest the green lemon, prepare the sweet spice mixture and juice all of the citron lemons.
05 In a large bowl, mix together the tongue, beef suet (also available from your butcher), pippins, green lemon zest, sweet spice mix, sugar, currents, sack (sweet wine), orange flower water (add to taste) and lemon juice.
06 Once your filling is well combined, fill your pies and roll out the pastry to fit the lids. Firmly press the lids on and decorate, and then glaze with melted butter.
07 Place your pies into a preheated oven at 220 degrees Celsius for ten minutes, and then reduce the heat to 180 degrees Celsius and cook for a further 25-30 minutes, covering if necessary. Serve with your favourite mead, and enjoy!
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Cleopatra
How a poisonous power struggle and doomed love affair sealed the fate of Egypt’s goddess queen

When they brought Mark Antony to Cleopatra, he was bleeding out fast. The Roman general had lost the battle, he believed his lover to be dead, and rather than surrender, he had chosen an honourable death and fallen upon his own sword. Hidden inside Cleopatra’s monument in the ancient city of Alexandria, Antony lay in her arms as strained, haggard breaths fell from his lips. He was wrong. She wasn’t dead. It would be his final mistake in a life ruled by rash decisions. He had fought wars for her, betrayed the state for her, killed for her and now he was dying for her. As Antony breathed his last, Cleopatra was, not for the first time, faced with the death of a man she loved. Their united force had the power to change the course of the Roman Empire and, ultimately, the world. However, the events that had led to that man dying in her arms actually began 14 years ago, with another captivating man and another tragic death.

Cleopatra had worked tirelessly to secure her future with Julius Caesar, forming a strong partnership with the Roman leader. She had also borne a son and claimed he was Caesar’s, naming him Caesarion, ‘little Caesar’. With her powerful lover by her side, she hoped her child could come to rule a unified and powerful kingdom. She even made steps to live with Caesar in Rome, but her plans came crashing down when the man she had pinned her ambitions to was brutally murdered, betrayed by those closest to him. The Egyptian ruler had been popular while she was with Caesar but, alone and exposed, the hostility in Rome began to close around her, and Cleopatra fled with her love child back to Egypt. There she would need to re-assess, re-group and plan her next move carefully.
he pharaoh was not the only one forced to re-assess her position upon the death of Caesar, there was another man whose entire future would be forever altered by it - Caesar's loyal general, Mark Antony. Antony had not had an easy upbringing. Although born into nobility, his father was corrupt and incompetent, meaning he had no strong parental figure to guide him. In his youth he fell into a life of gambling, drinking and love affairs with his greatest weakness: women. Antony was a rebellious, spirited youth and he revelled in the life of excess. It was not until he joined the military and began growing close to Caesar that his life was given order and focus.

Antony's relationship with Caesar had been anything but stable, but he had always returned to his superior's side and remained loyal, rejecting the offer to take part in the assassination, and trying, but failing, to warn Caesar of the plans. During his time as a general, Antony had gained political acumen, but even in his 40s he still possessed the fiery heart of a rebellious youth, and it was his heart that he followed without question. This passion bubbled over at Caesar's funeral when he was overcome with emotion and, as he spoke to the people, seized his leader's toga, stained with blood, and sent the spectators into a frenzy. The city erupted into a riot, buildings were burned to the ground and terrified conspirators fled.

It is for this reason - despite his lack of wisdom and subtlety - that his foes began to fear him. Antony was like a rabid animal, and his actions were impossible to predict. The power vacuum caused by Caesar's murder had plunged Rome into civil war, and it wasn't until 41 BCE that vague stability was established. Leadership of the empire was shared between Antony and Octavian, Caesar's adopted son and named heir; Octavian took the western states, while Antony ruled over the eastern region.

Facing the growing threat of the Parthian Empire, Antony wished to arrange a military campaign to push them back, but he lacked one thing: money. For this he set his sights on a powerful ally, and richest woman in the world – the Egyptian Pharaoh Cleopatra. She had aligned with his friend, Caesar, and he was hoping she would do the same for him. He summoned her to Turkey in 41 BCE, his sights set on using her riches to assert his own power.

Cleopatra, however, was no fool. Although she was aware a union with one of Rome's most powerful leaders would be mutually beneficial, she sent out a clear message that she was not to be won over easily. She denied Antony's request for a meeting twice, and when she finally agreed to meet the headstrong man, she ensured she made a lasting impression. Cleopatra sailed from Egypt to Tarsus, and for the final part of her journey she travelled in a magnificent barge. The sight of her as she sailed up the river to meet Antony was astonishing. The gilded vessel boasted purple sails and silver oars that rowed to the gentle music of harps and flutes. The barge was heaving with exotic flowers, scented with perfume, as the lady herself reclined on deck, dressed as the goddess Venus and fanned by young boys, while beautiful maids dressed like sea nymphs sailed the boat.

The sight had its intended effect: Antony was infatuated with Cleopatra from the moment he saw...
The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled over the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt, and originally descended from one of Alexander the Great's generals: Ptolemy. Prior to this, the Egyptians had been ruled by their own pharaohs. Ptolemy continued the Egyptian tradition of pharaohs marrying within the family, but this led to debilitating medical conditions down the line. Despite their reluctance to marry Egyptians, the pharaohs adapted many Egyptian customs, fusing them with Greek culture to produce a unique bicultural civilization.

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Cleopatra

SON OF CAESAR

The child whose paternity began a conflict that would change the world

Caesarion was the ill-fated son of Cleopatra and, according to her, Roman legend and her ex-lover Julius Caesar. Although Caesar himself never officially acknowledged the child, the fact that he allowed his lover to name him after him is indicative that he knew his paternity. Details surrounding the boy himself are shrouded in myth and legend, but it was frequently commented that he bore resemblance to his father in manner and looks. ‘Little Caesar’ spent his early years with his mother and father in Rome, with Cleopatra eager that Caesar acknowledge his son and make him his heir. However, hopes for this vanished with the leader’s assassination.

Cleopatra returned to Egypt with her beloved son, aged three, and as per tradition, he was named co-heir with his mother. The pharaoh was quick to weave her precious child into her propaganda, portraying him as the Horus to her Isis. This image of her son as a divine leader grew more prominent when Antony entered Cleopatra’s life. Together they created the title ‘king of kings’ and Antony also declared Caesarion to be Caesar’s true son and heir. This act is likely what damned the boy when his mother’s ships fled at the Battle of Actium. Efforts were made to smuggle the then 17-year-old Caesarion away to India, but through betrayal or trickery, he landed back in Octavian’s hands. Facing such a direct threat to his power, and believing ‘too many Caesars is not good’, it is likely the emperor had the teenager killed, though exact details of his death have been lost to time.

he accepted. She then had a modest, unremarkable meal, for which he mocked her. Then the pharaoh took a cup of strong vinegar and dropped one of her priceless pearl earrings into it, where it dissolved. This story originated some 100 years after the events and is unverified. However, the fact of its existence indicates the perception of the extravagance the couple enjoyed in Alexandria.

Meanwhile in Rome, Antony’s wife Fulvia was plotting. In an extreme bid to force her husband away from his affair, she publicly declared herself and Antony in opposition to Octavian – a reckless action that would eventually escalate into a full-scale war. Antony was furious with his wife for arranging a war in his name, and he quickly returned to Italy to make amends with his fellow co-ruler, Octavian. Fulvia died shortly after, and Antony used this opportunity to marry Octavian’s sister, Octavia, in a display of his allegiance. Antony was not ready for a war, not yet.

Cleopatra, meanwhile, was heavily pregnant with Antony’s twins and gave birth two weeks later to Alexander Helios (the Sun) and Cleopatra Selene (the Moon). Despite having no option but to watch Antony marry another, she seemed unconcerned. She continued to give Antony the military resources and money he required, confident that no woman, not even the sister of the leader of Rome, could eclipse her. As usual, Cleopatra was correct.

Antony was beginning to have doubts about Octavian’s loyalties and could not erase thoughts of his exotic beauty from his mind. In 37 BCE, he set sail for Syria with Octavia, who was pregnant at the time, but along the way he declared that his

"Antony, aligned with the most powerful and wealthy woman in the world, no longer feared his rival’s power or needed his support"
THE POWER OF THE GODS

Cleopatra identified herself with the goddess Isis – the healer who brought the dead back to life – and she wasn’t alone. From the earliest recordings of humanity, divinity has been a claim to rule.

Alexander the Great
Alexander not only presented himself as a god, he believed it too. He was convinced he was a descendant of the legendary warrior Achilles and the son of Zeus. He believed it was his divine destiny to defeat King Darius III.

Louis XIV
Regarded as a ‘god-given’ child, France’s bourbon monarch modelled himself as the ‘Sun-king’ that all the planets rotated around. Louis often presented himself in artwork as a god-like figure, playing the role of Apollo, Neptune or, as in this image, Jupiter, the king of the gods.

Francois Duvalier
Also known as Papa Doc, the infamous president of Haiti used god-like associations not to inspire devotion, but fear. He attempted to imitate Baron Samedi, a vodou spirit. His propaganda even claimed that he was god himself.

Caligula
Although many Roman emperors claimed divinity, Caligula became infamous for the way he went about it. He dressed as various gods and demigods in public, referred to himself as a god and even demanded that residents and senators worship him as a living god.
The death of Cleopatra has captured the imagination of artists for centuries with many different depictions being created. Some artists portrayed Cleopatra as a wise and powerful woman, while others depicted her as a seductive and cunning temptress. The imagery of Cleopatra’s beauty and allure has been used to symbolize the power of women and their ability to influence men.

Octavian returned to Italy while Antony diverted his course, following his heart back to Egypt. After four years apart, the two lovers were reunited. By now Antony had forgotten any allegiance he had to Octavian and, despite still being married to his rival’s sister, he married the mother of his twins. A year later, another child was born.

The two quickly returned to the life of excess they had enjoyed. In 34 BCE, despite Antony’s military campaign in Parthia ending in failure, the lovers celebrated a mock Roman Triumph not in Rome, but in Alexandria. They sat together on golden thrones surrounded by their offspring. For his grand finale, Antony finally let any guise of Roman loyalty fall away. He distributed lands held by Rome and Parthia to his new wife and their children, then in his most shocking move yet, proclaimed Caesarion, not Octavian, Caesar’s legitimate son and true heir.

Rome was outraged. Antony, aligned with the most powerful and wealthy woman in the world, no longer feared his rival’s power or needed his support, in fact, he was so confident in his victory that he had played his hand for all to see. For Cleopatra, this was the result of years of pragmatic power plays and investment – she had erased any allegiance Antony had to Rome, and he was now an Oriental lord. Ever the showman, she wrapped him in purple robes, draped him in jewels and thrust a golden sceptre into his hand. The queen of the Nile would need a king as splendid as her, and upsetting Octavian was exactly what she wanted to do.

In Rome, Octavian needed any excuse to rid himself of Antony and he seized his opportunity, depriving Antony of his powers and proclaiming him a man of low morals. Octavian worked relentlessly to turn public opinion against the man who had once been a hero, accusing him of “going native” - an especially heinous crime to Romans. However, he focused most of his attention on the pharaoh to avoid civil war, branding her a whore and a drunk.

For his part, Antony accused Octavian of being a social upstart, a usurper and even lying about his adoption by Caesar. Finally, Octavian declared war against Egypt and Cleopatra. He hoped that by omitting Antony from the war declaration he would not lend his forces to the queen, even summoning him back to Rome several times, but this was a foolish hope. Antony was Cleopatra’s completely, and he immediately joined with his queen to fight the war that had been inevitable since the day they met.

Octavian’s forces and the lovers’ combined fleet met off the coast of Actium. If Antony and Cleopatra’s forces could claim victory here, it would be a crucial step in forming their new united empire. However, for a reason known only to her, at the height of battle Cleopatra turned and fled with her ships. Antony, confused but utterly committed to his wife, followed her. This gave Octavian the perfect opportunity to invade Egypt. The self-proclaimed emperor ploughed through the country, and as he neared Alexandria, Antony’s armies deserted to Octavian. Antony, consumed by his love for Cleopatra, had ignored a very crucial aspect of war-popularity. One woman, however powerful she was, could not win a war - but armies could, and his foe had them all.

Antony was desperate. He attempted to seek refuge from the invading army in Alexandria, but found none. A rumour then reached him that Cleopatra had committed suicide and, believing it, Antony stabbed himself in the stomach to join his
Why is there so much doubt regarding how Cleopatra killed herself? Although the asp story was well promulgated within a year after her death, it was already being questioned by contemporary sources. It’s a bizarre and unique way to go, which may be why it became popular and why it was questioned. Octavian certainly believed it (or wanted to), because of the triumph and the representation of her in the procession with the asps, but we have to ask: was this part of the drama or real? We know Cleopatra sent a note to Octavian just before she killed herself, but no one ever found it. Cleopatra may have had enough sense of the dramatic to suggest this unique way of death – a snake was an important symbol in Egyptian culture. From a modern point of view, herpetologists have said the asp method is questionable, because a bite, unless in a very sensitive place, is not necessarily fatal, and it seems odd Cleopatra would have chosen an unreliable method. Poison seems much more likely, but doesn’t have the artistic and literary quality of the asp.

What was the significance of a snake in Egyptian culture? Snakes are the ultimate fertility symbol (probably because they live in the earth - the source of all fertility), and were particularly connected with Isis, which was Cleopatra’s alter ego. The traditional view of her with the uraeus and its snake is accurate; she always appeared at state functions dressed as the goddess. Snakes have always had a particularly dynamic role in Mediterranean cultures, and Cleopatra would have been willing to use this as her last statement.

How accurate is Shakespeare’s play Antony And Cleopatra? The play is amazingly accurate, but of course is based on the sources, not the more careful analysis of Cleopatra we can do today. Shakespeare used Plutarch’s biography of Antony, which is the best (and almost only) source we have on the queen, and even though he used an English translation of a French translation of the Greek, he follows Plutarch’s account very closely, almost word for word in places, turning the narrative into drama. A close reading of the play shows Shakespeare makes most of the points about her ability that are lurking in the sources, but often have been ignored because of the view of her as a great seductress who drove men to their doom.

Cleopatra: A Biography by Duane W Roller is out now, published by Oxford University Press. Roller is professor emeritus of Classics at the Ohio State University.
Q. Cleopatra was renowned for her beauty
- True
- False
Correct answer: From what we know from contemporary sources, Cleopatra wasn’t traditionally beautiful at all – it was her charisma and intelligence that brought powerful men to her beck and call.

Q. How many languages did Cleopatra speak?
- 1
- 3
- 9
Correct answer: We do not know for certain. Most historians agree that the queen spoke between five and nine languages, including her native Egyptian.

Q. Cleopatra was a ruthless seductress
- True
- False
Correct answer: Liaisons between royals were very common in the era. The reason Cleopatra became infamous was because she did not hide the paternity of her children. As far as we know, she only had two relationships in 18 years.

Q. She died from an asp bite
- True
- False
Correct answer: Some believe she administered the drug to herself. We do not know for certain.

Q. During her reign, Cleopatra was able to:
- Rescue Egypt’s economy
- Gain the Egyptian people’s respect
- Elevate Egypt’s power
Correct answer: It was actually Roman propaganda that was responsible for her loss. Contemporary accounts agree she was by far the most capable and beloved ruler, able to protect and expand her empire in the most dangerous and trying of times.

Q. Which of these Roman fashion statements did Cleopatra adopt after her time in the city?
- Roman hairstyle
- Pearl jewellery
- Neither
Correct answer: Although it is not confirmed, it was actually the other way around: Cleopatra popularised these styles in Rome and they were adopted by so many Roman women that it is a common misconception that it was Rome that popularised them.

Q. Cleopatra was a Roman citizen
- True
- False
Correct answer: Although it is not confirmed, it was common practice to offer citizenship to allied leaders. Mark Antony would have most likely ensured that Cleopatra was a fully certified Roman citizen.

Q. Cleopatra wrote a book about...
- Love
- Medicine
- History
Correct answer: Most historians agree that the queen spoke between five and nine languages, including her native Egyptian. Her treatise Cosmetics was concerned with pharmaceuticals, even offering remedies for hair loss.
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The Roaring Twenties that followed World War I were a time of celebration and extravagance. After years of wartime struggle, Americans were free to live life to the full. However, on 29 October 1929, the American stock market on Wall Street experienced the most disastrous crash in history of the USA. The after effects of this devastating event were immediately felt by Americans nationwide, and sent the country spiralling into what will be a decade-long depression. Many people have completely lost their life savings thanks to bank closures and many more have lost their jobs, with a quarter of the population unemployed. Interventions by the government have done little to help the common people, many of who have found themselves starving and homeless. Now, people must turn to more creative means for economic and personal survival.

WHERE TO STAY
As is often the case in the harshest economic climates, it is the poor who are suffering the most from the effects of the depression. Many of the rich feel little impact, and as many as 40 per cent of people are untouched by the hardship. It would be wise to avoid the various shantytowns or ‘Hoovervilles’ that have sprung up, as well as towns in the Midwest, which have been savaged by the Dust Bowl. The most secure places to stay are political centres, such as Washington, DC, because of the rapidly growing role of the government, which is supplying many new jobs – a rare opportunity in this unforgiving climate.

Dos & don'ts

☑ Be enterprising.
You must take advantage of every opportunity for income. For example, some women prepare meals and sell them to workers from their vehicles.

☑ Know when to leave.
Some cities are hit far worse by the depression and unemployment than others. Although it could be difficult, moving elsewhere may improve your circumstances.

☑ Pay with alternatives to cash.
You can pay for things with goods such as eggs, milk and other produce. Everything has a value.

☑ Join government programmes.
The Civilian Conservation Corps employs 3 million men to protect the nation’s natural resources.

☒ Forget mental wellbeing.
Many Americans use music and entertainment to escape from their hardships. You can even purchase a radio on credit.

☒ Surrender your rights.
Times being hard is no excuse for social oppression; there are countless social movements flooding the streets in protest, most famously the Bonus Army.

☒ Sit on possible incomes.
Lots of people are cashing in their life insurance policies and even the most insignificant of items can be sold or traded.

☒ Let being in a city stop you.
Many urban dwellers have built gardens for produce in the most unlikely of places, including rooftops.
Hunting
Obtaining food should be your priority, so having the ability to hunt, fish and forage will aid you hugely, and are three of the main ways in which families fill their bellies.

Cooking
Nearly all food is made from scratch and the ability to stretch limited produce is key to survival. One-dish suppers, casseroles and meals like bean sandwiches and macaroni and cheese are popular.

Jack of all trades
Knowing a variety of skills and trades will serve you well. Someone who knows a little about plumbing, painting and repairs is more likely to find work than someone with just one specific skill.

WHO TO BEFRIEND
Your neighbours
Your most valuable acquaintance during the depression is not one person, but many - your community. In such difficult times, communities have united to try to help each other. Of course there are some neighbours who steal and lie, but most show kindness and compassion. There is strength in numbers during the depression and it’s vital you get out there and make friends. Of particular note are store owners, such as grocers, who may be willing to extend credit for their friendly, neighbourly customers.

Extra tip:
One important thing to bear in mind when meeting people from this era is that they very much like to keep up appearances. They don't want to show how hard the times are, and there are examples of women using fabrics from all kinds of things, even caskets, to sew beautiful dresses.

Who to avoid
Bankers
The most unreliable and risky investment during the depression is the banks. The Wall Street Crash left people fearing for their finances, so huge numbers withdrew their deposits. This caused many banks to fail, and as more banks failed the people's belief in them diminished, with 1,300 failing in 1930 alone. Although it is this panic that has contributed to the depression, it's far too risky to use the banks. There is no telling when they may suddenly close without any warning. If you deposit your money there, you could lose it the very next day.

Helpful Skills
In a world without savings, what you have to offer will mean the difference between a full table or an empty stomach.
The Victorian Cult of Death

From superstitions to strange rituals, lift the veil on the fascinating and macabre ways the Victorians dealt with mortality.
From taking photographs of dead relatives to opening shops selling mourning clothes, the Victorians commercialised death. This was an era of industry, with hard work being seen as the creator of fortunes. By the end of the century, there would be compulsory schooling in Britain, better literacy levels, and scientific and medical progress across the Western world. Yet at the same time, the gap between rich and poor was enormous, and poverty levels, economic depression and high mortality rates meant that many were acutely aware of the inevitability of death.

This was heightened by the growth of newspapers, which covered catastrophic events such as the Great Famine in 1840s Ireland, and the deaths of the famous, the rich, and even the poor. In addition, reporters showed little restraint when writing about the horrendous living conditions of the urban poor in grisly detail.

You could not avoid death, either in reality or the media. Both in Britain and the USA, the press detailed strange, unpleasant demises, and the post-mortems that followed them. The Victorian era also saw the creation of illustrated newspapers that depicted corpses in dramatic situations, all to titillate readers. Given the prevalence of loss in everyday life, it is perhaps only natural the Victorians tried to understand it by writing and reading about the subject, and even by shopping for the occasion.

Disease was rife in the Victorian era, and illnesses we shake off today could kill a century ago. Alongside these common causes of death were suicides – the result of mental maladies or financial worries – and accidental deaths, caused by industrial accidents or other workplace incidents in days before health and safety regulations. Children were killed when their clothes caught flame from nearby candles, or when they were scalded with hot water from kettles. The Victorian world was, in short, a dangerous place to live.

**COMMON KILLERS**

Death lurked around every corner, but these were the most likely culprits –

- **Cholera**
  Cholera epidemics were common in the 19th century, and during the first half of the era, it was not known what caused the infection. Most believed it was due to ‘miasma’ – bad air – perhaps from open sewers. In the 1850s, British doctor John Snow proved that drinking contaminated water from shared water pumps was the true cause.

- **Scarlet fever**
  Prior to the use of penicillin, this was a common cause of death among children especially. A sore throat, fever and a distinctive red rash would be key signs that the illness had struck.

- **Typhoid**
  Typhoid, or typhoid fever, was, and is, a highly contagious bacterial infection that particularly affected children, because their immune system was less developed than adults. Symptoms included stomachaches, headaches and a high temperature, and the fever could result from poor sanitation or personal hygiene.

- **Drowning**
  Both a form of accidental death and a common choice of suicide method in Victorian times – it didn’t help that few people knew how to swim. Millais’ painting of Ophelia about to drown in 1852 made it appear rather more romantic than the reality.

- **Tuberculosis**
  Believed to be the cause of the Brontë siblings’ death, tuberculosis – commonly referred to as ‘consumption’ in the Victorian era – was a lung disease that caused a horrific and distinctive cough, weight loss and fever. As with so many Victorian diseases, it was infectious and spread through the air.
The inaccuracy of medical practices meant there was a real risk of a premature burial in the 19th century. To determine death, one technique included applying hot bread to the soles of the feet and checking for a reaction, so it’s not surprising the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial was established in 1896. They campaigned for reforms to ensure people were actually dead before the final nail in the coffin, reflecting fears across the West. A number of safety coffin designs were proposed to enable the prematurely buried to escape.

DYING TO LOOK GOOD

The deceased had to go through a range of procedures to prepare for their big day.

Victorian rituals started the second someone died. In the USA, curtains were drawn and clocks stopped at the time of the deceased’s death. The house where they had lived would be decorated in black crape, with a wreath hung on the front door. Flowers and candles were placed around the house – not for ambience, but to mask the smell of a decomposing body, lying in state. Corpses were commonly kept at home for around four days, although the duration decreased during the Victorian era. Photographs of family members might also be placed facedown to protect the people in them from being possessed by the dead person’s spirit. In Germany, a woman known as a ‘leichenfrau’ (corpse bride) would tend to a body, washing and clothing it. Elsewhere, household servants or female family members would take on this role. It was important that the body looked presentable, as people would come to the house to view the dead – a custom that often involved giving visitors food and drink.

When mortuaries were established for bodies to lie in until being interred, cadavers would be watched by attendants, dressed suitably in black, as a means of reassuring the grieving relatives that their loved one was being treated in a dignified way. The attendants were often women, perhaps because of their perceived ‘caring’ temperament. Both in Europe and across the Atlantic, bodies would be carried out of the house feet first, to prevent the dead’s spirit from making his relatives follow him. The funeral, however, was a largely male event. In the first half of the century, upper-class women would not have gone to funerals, although they might have decorated the coffin prior to the event with flowers, or cut the dead’s hair to put into lockets, brooches or rings. Even Queen Victoria did not attend the funeral of her beloved husband, Prince Albert.
The extravagance involved in many death-related rituals was at odds with the rather grave matter of stealing corpses. The Victorians spent as much money as they were able to on saying goodbye to the dead, and to preserving their memories. The wealthiest would opt for a grand mausoleum, while those who were less well-off might instead commission a gravestone or memorial for their loved ones. Sculptures of angels were particularly popular, signifying a guide to heaven, and sleeping children, flowers and doves, were inscribed onto headstones as well. This desire to establish something permanent was all the more poignant given the fears of grave robbing.

The body snatchers were prominent in early-19th-century Britain, but also in the US, and made money from selling fresh cadavers to medical schools. Prior to the Victorian period, anatomy students would use criminals who had been hanged. However, as the numbers of students increased, the shortage of bodies led to rather entrepreneurial individuals digging up corpses. This caused such panic that a deceased's family and friends would watch over a body until it was buried, and iron coffins were used along with mortsafes – iron bars to protect the coffin – to prevent bodies being dug up. People even drew up wills requesting they be buried in a strong coffin.

In the UK, the 1832 Anatomy Act enabled unclaimed bodies and those donated by relatives to be used for science, effectively ending the trade in corpses. However, in the USA, this sinister business continued until the late-19th century, as more medical schools were established, and in 1878, a US congressman's body was snatched by Ohio Medical College students. But even if body snatching was becoming less common as the Victorian period progressed, the fear of it remained, along with the practice of creating a lasting memorial to a loved one.

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Dark chambers beneath Paris keep the remains of 6 million people.

Deep beneath the heart of Paris, just south of the former city gate appropriately named the Gate of Hell, are the city catacombs. Beginning in the 1780s, the remains of more than 6 million people have gradually been moved here. The distinctive stacking of skulls that visitors can see today is a result of the renovations that took place in the early-19th century, when the cemeteries were overflowing. Remains were moved to Paris's former quarries, and skulls and bones were stacked from floor to ceiling. There were even separate rooms to display skeletal deformities and monumental tablets. From 1850, the catacombs opened to the public four times a year, and as interest grew, this was eventually increased to daily visits in the 1900s and has remained a macabre attraction ever since.

Skulls and other human bones line the walls of the Paris catacombs.

- 20 metres: The depth is equivalent to a five-storey building.
- 800 metres: The length of the galleries in the ossuary.
- 14°C: The constant temperature in the catacombs.
Memento mori – meaning ‘remember you will die’ – were physical reminders of mortality, and could take various forms. Watches decorated with phrases relating to death, rings featuring locks of hair from deceased loved ones, brooches featuring skull designs or images - items such as these were used to both remember the dead and to remind the living that they would follow suit. At the most disturbing level to modern minds, the Victorians also took post-mortem photographs of the dearly departed, often posed with their surviving relatives. Due to the cost, this would sometimes be the only photograph ever taken of an individual.

Queen Victoria was a deeply unpopular queen for many years after the death of Prince Albert. It was felt she had gone overboard with mourning for her much-loved husband, wearing widow’s weeds for longer than was traditional and hiding herself away. For there were rules and expectations surrounding how Victorians should deal with death and its attendant rituals. Even what they wore was subject to detailed procedures - so much so that household manuals advised readers as to what was appropriate and how long a particular outfit should be worn. Initially, women wore deepest mourning clothes that were black and made of silk, bombazine or crape. Then, gradually, the colours could lighten, becoming grey or mauve. The length of time they wore mourning clothes depended on who had died - was it a husband (which required two years’ mourning), or a cousin (just one month)?

With mourning clothes required, so too were shops specialising in such outfits. This was especially so, as the superstitious Victorians saw it as unlucky to store mourning outfits at home 'between uses' and so disposed of their clothes once the period of mourning had ended, buying new outfits each time someone died. Black-edged stationery was also required, and when the deceased's family wished to signal that they were ready to socialise again, they were supposed to leave cards with their friends – if they didn’t, these friends would leave them alone, to respect their privacy. If cards were left for them to inquire as to their well-being, they were expected to send cards back with “thanks for kind inquiries” written on them. As with many Victorian customs, it was all about one's social appearance, and one magazine noted that “established customs” should be adhered to simply to avoid “shocking” society and appearing “heartless”.

"The superstitious Victorians saw it as unlucky to store mourning outfits at home between uses"
Spiritualism – the belief that ghosts exist and we can communicate with them – came into being as a movement in 1848 via three American sisters: Leah, Margaret and Kate Fox. The trio hit the headlines with a sensational (and totally bogus) ghost story in which they said they had communicated with the spirit haunting their home using a series of knocks – one for ‘yes’, two for ‘no’. Rumours soon spread that the spirit belonged to a murdered peddler whose body was hidden in the cellar. The women were quickly promoted as mediums, making a fortune by holding crowded séances where they would contact the deceased at the audience’s command.

With this business model behind them, mediums began to spring up all over the USA and then in Britain, holding intimate gatherings in darkened homes or more outlandish spectacles in music halls and theatres - for a fee.

Some might have been well-intentioned, genuinely convinced they could contact the dead, but most were frauds, using dim gaslight, sleight of hand and ingenious contraptions to hoodwink the vulnerable. Sadly, many were only too willing to believe. With technology advancing at an unbelievable pace, anything seemed possible. If they could send messages between continents via cables, then why couldn’t they communicate with the afterlife?

Take my hand
The lights are turned down or put out completely and the medium invites the participants to hold hands, or hold the wrist of the person to their left or right, to prove there’s no foul play.

The spirits arrive
Pretending to enter a trance to communicate with the spirits, the medium switches and jerks one hand loose. Scrambling for it in the dark, the participants either side don’t realise they’ve been tricked into taking the same hand.

The spirits reach out
Using either their own hand, a waxwork replacement, a stuffed glove or a telescopic rod to reach across the table, the medium can now pretend a spirit is touching the audience.

Sound effects
Should the ghostly tradesman have required it, the sound of sawing wood could be made by dragging the trumpet across the floor or moving the collapsible sections up and down within each other.

Voices from the void
In other séances the trumpet would be the centre of attention rather than a sneaky secret, channeling spooky whispers from the beyond – either the medium was a ventriloquist or he had a hidden accomplice.

Spectral lights
Mysterious glowing orbs, objects or even faces could be produced by adding a dab of luminous paint to a stick, which would then appear to hover above the table.

Deadly Drowning
Most distressingly, one account recalls a medium sneaking a bowl of water onto the table and blowing through a straw to simulate drowning. He cried out, “Help! Help me!” for good measure.
19th-century authors created characters that played on contemporary fears about strangers, crime and disease. Here are the most famous:

**Dracula**
Count Dracula, a vampire, was a creature caught between life and death. He is thought to reflect fears of immigration and sexual promiscuity. Being bitten is akin to being diseased, with ‘cures’ being sought to make the bitten well again.

**Mr Hyde**
The mysterious, hunchbacked Hyde is the alter-ego of Dr Jekyll, who has created a potion that enables him to become this repulsive being. Hyde represented both sex – something Victorians were keen to ‘hide’ – and the supernatural.

**Frankenstein's monster**
Victor Frankenstein's creation of a monster made of body parts from dead criminals reflected concerns about body snatchers, and how medicine and science – in particular, the development of electricity – could be used for evil as well as good.

**Heathcliff**
The anti-hero of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is not a monster per se, but is certainly monstrous. He comes from an unknown background, is cruel and feared by others. His darkness and outcast status make him akin to Hyde and Frankenstein's monster.

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**THE MEANING OF MONSTERS**

**TELLING GHOST STORIES**

In an era of austere poverty and high mortality, the Victorians developed an appetite for horror.

Gothic fiction was a type of horror story that originated in the late-18th century, but peaked during the Victorian era. From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (1886), Victorian audiences were fed a literary diet of monsters and ghouls, both entertaining and frightening in equal measure.

This genre of fiction was not restricted to Britain; in Germany, the Schauerroman ('shudder novel') featured similar motifs, while in Russia, Vladimir Odoevsky penned *The Living Corpse* in 1838, with Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy publishing *The Vampire* two years later. The most famous purveyor of Gothic fiction in the USA was Edgar Allan Poe, and his tales of madness were seen as following the German style of Gothic horror. *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* and his poem *The Raven* still send chills down spines today.

Victorian Gothic horror frequently involved death, or the fear of death, reflecting society's preoccupation with the subject - a result of high mortality rates and the constant threat of disease. Panics about crime and rural to urban migration also sparked concerns about the stranger in one's midst. People were less likely to know their neighbours in Victorian times than they would have done in earlier, more stable, rural communities, and the increasing number of strangers led to them being demonised in fiction.

The after-effects of the industrial revolution were felt in depictions of cities as sprawling, dark places, and the growing gap between rich and poor was also portrayed as something evil, as shown in works by authors such as Bram Stoker and Charles Dickens. But most of all, the obsession with Gothic literature reflected the Victorians' similar obsession with mortality, death, and mourning.

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**THE VICTORIAN CULT OF DEATH**

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**MURDER AND MAYHEM AT THE GRAND GUIGNOL**

Before slasher movies, there was a French theatre of terror that turned stomachs.

Penning in 1897, Paris’s Théâtre du Grand-Guignol shocked and thrilled audiences with murder and torture so realistic it made people vomit and faint. It was originally designed to explore subjects not normally seen as fit for theatre - criminals, prostitutes and sinister asylums - to criticise the social inequalities of the era; its name was taken from a violent French puppet, in the style of English Punch and Judy, but the plays were strictly for adults.

The building had originally been a chapel, and the ‘confessional’ style boxes, Gothic style and angels flanking the stage, bearing witness to the brutal acts, only added to the eerie ambience. Some plays looked at the individual consciousness and the passage from one existence to another, and this was key to the theatre’s success. Death was ever present in real life, but the horrors of the Grand Guignol could actually offer comfort by helping audiences understand it – and the possibility of some form of life beyond the veil.
Ancient Egyptians believed in giving their dead an appropriate send-off, constructing elaborate mausolea to them, and entombing their corpses with personal possessions that might assist them in the afterlife. For the Victorians, with their morbid and complex rituals, the example of these ancient people was one to follow. Throughout the 19th century, Egyptian influences could be found in women’s mourning jewellery, which often featured obelisks or scarabs, and on tombs, mausolea, cemetery gates and even entire graveyards, which had an Egyptian style of architecture or decorative features.

Ancient Egyptian texts were translated by German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius in the 1840s, and detailed their beliefs about death and the afterlife, showing dead bodies reanimating. Naturally, the Victorians were very curious about Egyptian mummies. Antiquities had been brought from Egypt to Europe - especially England, but also Italy and Germany - in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, but now, these concealed corpses became objects of intense interest.

At the start of the era, surgeon Thomas Pettigrew began organising public events where people could go to watch mummies being unwrapped. However, these cod-scientific displays were, in reality, more about playing on people’s desire to be scared and entertained. Pettigrew would saw off parts of the mummy’s skull, showing how the brains had been removed, and, for his big finale, would raise the mummy to its feet, as though it was still alive. Such events continued throughout the century.

This link between fear, entertainment and science, with its specific Egyptian focus, was highlighted by the presence of the Egyptian Hall in London’s Piccadilly. Built in Egyptian style in 1812, it was originally a museum designed to house curiosities from the South Seas, but by the late 1800s it was associated with séances, theatre and magic shows - consistent with the general trend toward spookiness, from the curious and enlightened 1820s to the morbidly fascinated 1880s. The in-house duo of Maskelyne and Cooke did openly fake séances and hauntings, and it became famous for ‘anti spiritualism’. John Nevil Maskelyne probably wondered why he bothered. So skilful were the pair’s recreations that, “…the Spiritualists had no alternative but to claim us as the most powerful spirit mediums who found it more profitable to deny the assistance of spirits.”

In a world that was advancing at an unprecedented pace - where steam trains carved a path through the countryside and suspension bridges loomed large on the landscape - the Victorian era was also a golden age of belief. Religion, spiritualism and magic pervaded every aspect of daily life, from literature and architecture, to fashion and social etiquette - it was a unique period in history where science and the supernatural were often one and the same.

As Egyptomania swept through Victorian England, centuries-old corpses inspired a wave of creepy customs.
Nostradamus

One of the most infamous oracles of all time, was Nostradamus a divine prophet or a fraud?

Written by Willow Winsham

Hailed recently as the author of the ‘Gospel of Doom for the modern age’, Michel de Nostredame - or Nostradamus as he is more commonly known - has had a chequered reputation over the centuries. Born in the French town of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence as 1503 came to a close, Nostradamus was one of at least nine children born to a notary father and a mother from whom he could claim a family history in medicine. Little could they have suspected, however, that his name would become synonymous with mayhem and catastrophe both during his lifetime and beyond.

Although the details of his life are often disputed, it is generally assumed that Nostradamus began his professional life at the University of Avignon, although this was brought to an abrupt end in 1521 due to the spread of plague to the city. This opened up new horizons for the young man, and, if reports are to be believed, Nostradamus did not waste the time that followed, spending eight years researching herbal remedies as he roamed the countryside. This stood him in good stead for working as an apothecary, a vocation that he took to keenly for several years, providing cures and tinctures for those who came to him in his self-imposed exile.

In 1529, he decided to try again at the university route, and enrolled to study for a doctorate in medicine at the University of Montpellier. This was also to be short-lived, as he was asked to leave when not only his previous trade as an apothecary was discovered (something that was strictly against the rules of the university) but also rumours abounded that he had been speaking out against the medical profession. This lack of formal training did not, however, greatly harm his prospects. In 1531, Nostradamus moved to Agen, married and had two children. Following the death of his wife, he continued on with his previous travels. It was during this time that his reputation as a healer of plague was established (although there is little evidence that his attempted cures in either Marseille or his native Salon-de-Provence were successful) before in 1547, he settled once again in his hometown. Here, Nostradamus married for the second and final time, his new wife a widow of wealth who bore him six children during their time together.

Nostradamus’s first official dabbling with the occult and connected subjects came in the mid-1500s, when he produced the first of a long run of annual almanacs of predictions and weather forecasts, capitalising on the popularity of this new craze. Nostradamus’s work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the wealthy and prestigious, building up a client base that prized his ability to produce personalised predictions and charts. Despite his reputation as a seer, however, Nostradamus expected his clients to do a lot of the legwork. Whereas a professional astrologer would calculate the birth charts himself,
“Nostradamus’s work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the wealthy and prestigious.”
Nostradamus cunningly requested this information be provided for him. This was potentially due to a lack of skill and confidence in that area, as the charts that he did produce did not stand up under scrutiny and led to criticism from other astrologers.

As Nostradamus rose to prominence in the world of the mystical and arcane, Catherine de Medici, queen of Henry II of France, also sought out his services. It could be said this was skilfully orchestrated by Nostradamus himself, as a prediction in his almanac for 1555 contained a prediction that hinted at impending danger for the royal family. Understandably worried by this and believing wholeheartedly in the power of such predictions, the queen summoned Nostradamus to Paris in 1556, and during the meeting, commissioned horoscopes for her children, including the future kings of France Charles IX and Henry of Anjou. Nostradamus is said to have predicted the rise of Anjou, something that must have caused great satisfaction for Catherine, especially as her son was at the time only sixth in line to the throne. They met again some years later when Nostradamus was an old man, in his native Salon-de-Provence itself. The royal party of Catherine and Charles IX braved the plague-ridden town to meet the man who Catherine held in such esteem. During the meeting, Nostradamus was created both a king's physician and a royal councillor, along with being rewarded for his services with 200 écus.

Nostradamus was not popular with everyone, however. There were those who denounced him and called him a liar and a fake; some even went as far as to declare him insane or outright evil. This less than flattering reputation has survived long after his death due to the resurgence of interest in the most popular and famous of Nostradamus's works – the predictions contained in the series of quatrains known as The Prophecies. Published in three editions, the last after his death, the quatrains speak in general terms of various types of catastrophes, focusing particularly on natural disasters such as earthquakes, plagues and floods, along with wars, murders and invasions. Some have even credited Nostradamus with predicting numerous pivotal events throughout history, from the Great Fire of London and the French Revolution to the two world wars, the 9/11 tragedy and even the death of Princess Diana.

“Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by god to bring his word to the world”
The general vagueness of The Prophecies – in most cases the quatrains lack dates entirely, and where they are mentioned they are used in the most general terms – allows a reader to interpret his words according to their own beliefs and agenda. Indeed, one of the greatest criticisms of the writings of Nostradamus – both from his contemporaries and modern readers – is the general feeling of confusion due to the wordiness and lack of clarity, with more than one client complaining that they could not understand a word that had been written for them. This has been further hindered by the fact that no two editions or even copies in some cases of the quatrains are the same – both printing methods and the translation process have compounded the often-impenetrable nature of his works.

Although heralded as a prophet, Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by God to bring his word to the world, and in fact it was not a term Nostradamus used in relation to himself. He actually refuted the claim on at least one occasion in print. The label of prophet ascribed to him by his supporters – much like that of ‘doctor,’ which was used of him on several occasions despite the fact he had never achieved a degree in medicine – did more to enhance his status than hinder it, and it would have been a much less worldly man than Nostradamus who would have spurned the benefits to be had from such an association.

It has been said that Nostradamus worried for his reputation and even his life on occasion. Some sources maintain that he feared the might of the Inquisition itself, although this has since been disputed, as it was religious differences rather than any occult belief or practice that led to his brief conflict with the Church in Agen in 1538. There have also been several practices attributed to Nostradamus through the ages to enhance his occult status, with assertions made that he was adept in fire and water gazing. These claims, however, cannot be substantiated, and instead form part of the ever-evolving myth. There is also little evidence to support accusations of secret adherence to Protestantism and hostility towards the Catholic Church; his writings contain no censure of the church and he was favoured by Catholic leaders such as Catherine de Medici, his clients being drawn from a mix of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds.

By the mid-1560s, the elderly Nostradamus was not in good health, suffering increasingly from gout and dropsy. Perhaps sensing the end was near, he set his affairs in order, providing for his wife to live comfortably in the event she should remarry and also leaving provision for his children after his death. This was not done a moment too soon; on the night of 1 July 1566, according to legend, Nostradamus went to bed with the chilling prediction to his secretary that he would not be alive come morning. True to his word, he was discovered dead the next day, exactly as he had predicted.

Defining Moment
End of Days
After his death, Nostradamus’s reputation and reach continued to grow. The powers and pronouncements attributed to him have reached beyond the grave, including the (misinterpreted) assertion that the world would end in 2012. Nostradamus has been credited with predicting many historical events, and the legend lives on in reprints of his works and more than 2,000 commentaries to date.

1566

Was Nostradamus a hero or a villain?
Let us know what you think

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**476**
Odoacer, a former Roman army officer, deposes Emperor Romulus Augustulus and proclaims himself ruler of Italia (Italy). This marks the end of Western Roman Empire.

**488**
Emperor Zeno of the Byzantine (Eastern) Roman Empire sends the Gothic leader Theoderic to retake Italia, which begins a four-year war.

**493**
Theoderic and Odoacer eventually agree a truce but Theoderic kills Odoacer at the celebration banquet and rules Italy for 34 years.

**527**
Justinian I becomes emperor of the Byzantine Empire and begins a campaign to restore the lost Western half of the ancient Roman Empire.

**536-540**
Justinian's generals, Belisarius and Narses, capture several important cities but Belisarius falls out with Justinian, and he is recalled to Constantinople.
What was it?
When Justinian I became the Byzantine Emperor in 527, the Italian peninsula had been ruled by the Goths since the fall of Rome in the previous century. Justinian sought to conquer the former lands of the Roman Empire and so attacked simultaneously from the north and south. The Goths couldn't defend against both at once and the southern army, commanded by General Belisarius, swept up from Sicily to seize Rome.

The Goths went through four different leaders in this time due to infighting and assassination, before they finally elected Totila in 541. At this point, the tide of the war changed and Totila re-captured Florence, followed by Naples. Totila chose to by-pass heavily defended Rome and instead attacked in the south, where Roman garrisons were spread thinly. He destroyed the fortifications of each town but showed mercy to the inhabitants, hoping to recruit them to his cause. This time it was the Byzantines that were divided, since Justinian was simultaneously fighting against the Persians. But in 545, this ended in a truce and Justinian’s armies were free to finally rout the Goths.

What were the consequences?
Although Justinian eventually defeated the Goths, the protracted war was catastrophic for his empire. 20 years of fighting had made farming almost impossible and famine engulfed the countryside. Tens of thousands died of starvation and the city of Rome lay in ruins, its aqueducts destroyed by the Goths and its population reduced from 1 million to just 35,000. Most of the Roman Senate was put to the sword in a frenzy of revenge after Totila was killed in battle. Within a few years, three quarters of the city was deserted, with open expanses of grassland growing within the city walls.

Italy was so depleted by the war that the Byzantine Empire couldn’t hold it for long. Justinian died in 565, and within three years, the Lombards, another Germanic tribe, invaded from the north. The Byzantines managed to defend a few coastal towns that could be resupplied by sea, but classic Roman Italy was gone forever.

Who was involved?
Justinian I
C.482 – 14 November 565
The emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire sought to recover the territories of Ancient Rome. His victory cost him the empire.

Flavius Belisarius
C.505 – c. March 565
Commander in chief for Justinian’s invasion of Italy. Belisarius was frequently denied reinforcements by the emperor.

Baduila, aka Totila
Unknown-552
Totila was the most successful of the Ostrogoth leaders during the war. He was eventually killed at the Battle of Taginae.
THE ORDER OF ASSASSINS

From their mountain holdfasts, this deadly Medieval sect unleashed holy terror, striking fear into kings and sultans alike

Written by Peter Price

The act of assassination is as old as humanity itself. It is so culturally ingrained that it is symbolically mentioned in the book of Genesis, telling that even some of the first humans committed the act. The secretive Islamic sect called Hashshin, or Assassins, did not invent the act but merely lent its name.

The Assassins, who were also known as Ismaiili, were a breakaway sect of Shia Islam known as Nizari Ismaiili. They operated in the Middle East from about 1090, just before the advent of the First Crusade, to 1256, and held a string of strongholds that extended through modern-day Syria and the Levant. Correspondence sent to the Middle East by the Holy Roman emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, places their location in the mountains near Aleppo, Damascus and Antioch, which would see them surrounded by enemies on all sides. After Western Christendom forged the Crusader States in the Holy Land, these kingdoms, along with the Islamic Seljuk Empire reigning supreme in the East, hemmed in the Assassins.

The order was founded by a man named Hassan-i Sabbah, a follower of the Ismaili beliefs and a popular preacher in Persia. Hassan used his fame to gain sufficient followers to found the Order of the Assassins. He was known as a thinker and writer, as well a warrior and would claim the name 'Old Man of the Mountain', a title that would pass to each subsequent leader, giving him a timeless quality. He led the Ismaili to break from the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt, who he saw as usurpers, and settle in Syria where they could be free to practice their beliefs. As Ismaiili was a Shia sect of Islam, it was immediately at odds with the Sunni rulers of the Levant, and these Muslim leaders would become some of the Assassins' most numerous foes. There were also clashes with the Crusader kingdoms, but these were not always sought after and mostly occurred when the Christians encroached upon the Ismaiili's lands.

The Ismaiili held power through a string of heavily defended fortresses, the largest and headquarters being Alamut Castle. Choosing to occupy these strongholds, located in the Syrian mountains, was no accident, as it gave the Assassins the protection and isolation they needed to safeguard themselves from their enemies. For more than 100 years they held off repeated attacks from the Seljuks, various Crusader states and the Fatimids before finally succumbing to the combined forces of the Mongols and the Egyptian sultan.

Many followers of the Old Man in the Mountain came from the mountainous and rural communities that existed around their fortresses, which also served as a source of young recruits. In the cities of the Holy Land they could find allies in artisans, tradesmen and the working-class population, although higher patronage seemed out of their reach.
The Order of Assassins

An aura of fantasy surrounds the Assassins, and they were renowned for their fanaticism and loyalty, supposedly gained through drugging and subterfuge. Travellers like Marco Polo recorded the sect’s bizarre initiation rituals during their journeys throughout the Middle East, although it is worth noting that Polo was born in 1254, and his work refers to Sabbah as the Old Man of the Mountain, but he had been dead for more than a century when Polo was born.

The Venetian writes of a paradise built by Sabbah that contained such wonders that prospective young men who were chosen as apprentice Assassins, and drugged upon their arrival, would not want to leave. Whether or not this fanciful tale has any truth to it, it shows how the rest of the world viewed the Assassins: as a secretive and cult-like sect. These men were being conditioned to follow Sabbah’s orders and their loyalty was known throughout the Middle East and beyond. “You have me more fully in your power than the old man has his Assassins,” was a line from a Provençal troubadour’s repertoire, highlighting how far the knowledge of Assassins’ loyalties had spread and was a source of wonder to leaders throughout the world.

What the Assassins were most remembered for, however, are their killing sprees that struck fear into the hearts of Muslims and Christians alike. They were looked upon with disdain and disgust by the majority of the Christian kingdoms because of their unorthodox and unconventional way of killing. The disdain in which they were viewed is evident with one writing stating, “This breed of men live without law,” and found the Ismaalis ate pork, an oddity among Muslims.

The Crusaders inhabited a world where martial prowess and chivalric honour were key components in both diplomacy and battle. In the Latin kingdoms and Western Europe, the Franks would have looked down on the Assassins as they kill with stealth, treachery and deceit rather than killing a man ‘honourably’. A German priest named Brocardus describes them with venomous hatred, saying they, “…are thirsty for human blood, kill the innocent for a price, and care nothing for either life or salvation.”

The reason for the Assassins’ inception and calculated murders is still up for debate. However, tyrannicide and a religious obligation to remove unworthy rulers were two motives that undoubtedly drove them. The killing of rulers for the perceived good of the land has occurred throughout history, such as Julius Caesar being murdered in an effort to save the Roman Republic. The Ismaili victims were chiefly princes, officials, ministers and religious figures who were mostly Sunni Muslims and Crusaders. Following a code not to take innocent lives, native Jews, Christians and Shias were spared the knife.

To further add to their reputation, the Assassins apparently only used daggers for their ‘holy’ work. Missiles and poison - popular killing devices in the Middle Ages - may never have been utilised.

“The Assassins had no qualms about targeting their victims in full view of witnesses, which set them apart from other hired killers”

ASSASSINS’ HIT LIST

**EDWARD I**
By the time of Edward I’s Crusade, the Assassins as an organisation had disappeared but there were still individuals that possessed their skill. As the assailant crept into Edward’s bedchamber, the English king, alerted to his presence, grappled and killed his opponent with his bare hands.

**CONRAD OF MONTFERRAT**
The highest ranking of the Assassins’ many victims, Conrad was stabbed to death during a meeting of clergy in Tyre. The Assassins had disguised themselves as Christian monks in order to get close enough to the king of Jerusalem.

**NIZAM AL-MULK**
A powerful Seljuk sultan, al-Mulk was stabbed while being carried on his litter by a beggar, later discovered to be an Assassin in disguise. The story goes that al-Mulk and Hassan-i Sabbah were old friends that had quarrelled, seeing the latter have his old companion killed.

**SALADIN**
As a Sunni Muslim, Saladin, the archenemy of Richard the Lionheart, was also at odds with the Shia Assassins. Dressed as soldiers, the Assassins made two attempts at murder: once in 1175 during the siege of Aleppo, and the following year during the siege of Azaz. Saladin’s well-crafted armour saw him escape both.

**THE LONG ARM OF THE ASSASSINS**
Kings and sultans went to great lengths to protect themselves if they raised the ire of the Old Man of the Mountain.

The long arm of the Assassins could reach anywhere. Kings and sultans went to great lengths to protect themselves if they raised the ire of the Old Man of the Mountain.
even when they would have been perhaps more effective. Their method of killing enabled them to wield terror as a political weapon against their enemies and kept the small state in power for centuries without a substantial army to back it up. The Assassins had no qualms about targeting their victims in full view of witnesses, which set them apart from other hired killers of the time.

Both Muslim and Christian leaders had to be constantly mindful of their safety and Saladin, a Kurdish leader who attempted to unify the Muslim world, took to sleeping in a wooden tower for added security after multiple attempts on his life. The reigning king of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, Conrad of Montferrat, was the first Christian leader targeted by the Assassins in 1192. The brutal stabbing in his home city of Tyre was a direct projection of the Assassins’ power. Being killed in broad daylight while surrounded by a bodyguard of knights was unheard of in the kingdom of heaven. One of the Assassins confessed under torture that Richard the Lionheart had organised Conrad’s death, as the two men regularly clashed. A letter written by the Old Man in the Mountain to the European princes absolved Richard of all blame in the murder. He stressed the fact that innocent bystanders were never targeted or permitted to come to harm.

By eliminating key figures in either a Muslim or Christian Kingdom, the Assassins could control the politics of the region without flexing military muscle. This verse from an Ismaili poet shows

The Order of Assassins

Ticket to paradise

Many years of tall tales have led the Assassins’ origins to become the stuff of legends.

The initiation rituals of the Assassins are filled with mythology and folklore. The most famous account of their way of life comes from the Venetian Marco Polo, who wrote of a “...garden, the largest and most beautiful that ever was seen... There were runnels... nowning freely with wine and milk and honey... (and) the most beautiful damsels in the world, who could play on all manner of instruments... and danced in a manner that it was charming to behold. For the Old Man desired to make his people believe that this was actually Paradise.”

Led into this ‘paradise’ would be young men drugged with hashish who would become loyal to Old Man, as they believed he would grant them eternal life if they followed his earthly wishes. They would be known as Fedayeen, an Arabic term that describes someone willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. This tale and substance may have influenced the name ‘hashashin’ and eventually ‘assassin’, which we still use today to denote hired killers.

Polo almost certainly invented the tale to impress the courts back in Europe and scholars have agreed that the effects of hashish would have been well known at this time, meaning that the young men who took the drug would probably have known what had been given to them.

Tales of the Assassins’ fanatic loyalty also abounded, with a one anecdote describing a meeting between Count Henry of Champagne and the Old Man of the Mountain. Henry’s army was ten times larger than the Old Man’s, and the count boasted that he obviously controlled the most powerful force. The Old Man countered, and ordered his men throw themselves from the castle walls. Without hesitation, the Assassins leapt from the ramparts, shocking the count and forcing him to agree that the zealous Assassins were superior.

This calligram, the Ismail Lion, symbolises the lion of God for the Nizari Ismailis branch of Shia Islam

Disguised as a beggar, a white-turbaned Assassin strikes at Nizam al-Mulk when he is least expecting it

Without hesitation, Assassins take their own lives to demonstrate their leader’s power

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The confidence the organisation had in its surgical strikes: "Brothers, when the time of triumph comes, with good fortune from both worlds as our companion, then by a single warrior on foot a king may be stricken with terror, though he own more than a hundred thousand horsemen."

In order to reach their targets, the Assassins needed to be masters of disguise and would often adopt the style of local populations in order to blend in. Images of hooded and masked men skulking through the shadows are certainly romantic but unfortunately rather conspicuous, especially in the daylight. Props were also key to their deceit, as seen in the first recorded assassination in 1106. Using a captured Frankish knight's horse and armour, six Assassins were sent to eliminate a rival religious figure from Cairo and managed to bluff their way into the target's presence without raising suspicion.

Psychological as well as physical violence were among the Assassins' tools. Ahmad Sanjar, a Seljuk sultan, had been waging war on the Ismaili castles and had repeatedly refused peace negotiations with any ambassadors sent to him. Supposedly Sanjar awoke one morning to a note asking for peace stuck beside his bed with a knife. A messenger soon arrived from the Assassins saying, "Did I not wish the sultan well that the dagger which was struck in the hard ground would have been planted on your soft breast." Terrified, Sanjar ensured that decades of peace were maintained between the Seljuks and the Ismaili, with lucrative tax collections greatly benefiting the latter.

The fear that the Ismaili inspired in the holy land has led to a slightly distorted view of this secret order. The Mongols destroyed any written records the Assassins may have kept of themselves when they sacked Alamut Castle, and so most of our information comes from their enemies. The Assassins were another political kingdom in the holy land and not just a radical, dangerous organisation, as the Frankish or Muslim chroniclers would have us believe.

Although their main military tactic was one of defence and surgical strikes, the Ismaili were known to forge military and political alliances when necessary or when it suited them. Even though the Turks were usually seen as the enemy, there are instances of alliances between the two factions. In 1126, the Assassins and Turkish joined in a combined attack against the Crusaders, although this ended in failure.

"Caught between a hammer and an anvil, the Assassin castles fell one by one until their Syrian powerbase was totally destroyed"
By the year 1227, the Assassins were a political powerhouse, so much so that Emperor Frederick II made a detour on his Crusade to pay tribute to the Old Man of the Mountain. At the same time, the Knights Hospitaller demanded that the Ismaili pay tribute. The response was simple: “Your king the Emperor gives to us; will you then take from us?” This open defiance was not taken kindly by the knights and they attacked the Assassins’ stronghold and were able to make off with a substantial amount of booty.

The decline of the Assassins came from fighting enemies on two fronts. The first and most deadly were the Mongols. These horsemen from the Asian steppes struck the Middle East like a thunderbolt in 1256, crushing anyone who resisted them. The Assassins, along with the other Islamic factions, put aside their differences to face this new threat, but to no avail. The Assassins may have even aggravated the Mongols by attempting to have one of their leaders, Mongke Khan, killed. After this failed attempt, the Mongolian General Hulagu Khan besieged and captured Alamut in the same year.

The second foe manifested himself as Bayber, a sultan of Egypt who had his sights set on liberating the Levant from both Frankish and Mongol occupation. The Ismaili, being an independent and deadly faction caught in the middle of the two greater powers, was a danger in his eyes. Caught between a hammer and an anvil, the Assassin castles fell one by one until their Syrian powerbase was totally destroyed.

The Assassins were wiped out as an independent faction but some still operated in the years following the fall of their stronghold, most notably making an attempt on Edward I of England during his Crusade. By the late-13th century, however, the Assassins had ceased to exist as a co-ordinated group. The Ismaili ultimately failed to effectively challenge the other major powers and carve out a kingdom of their own, but in trying, they forged a legacy that would echo through the ages.
MARY S LOVELL

Mary S Lovell has published ten bestselling biographies including The Mitford Girls that was based on interviews with four of the sisters: Debo, Diana, Pam and Decca.
HITLER'S
BRITISH
FANGIRL

A Nazi, a fascist, a communist, a duchess, a novelist and a countrywoman - the Mitford sisters defined 1930s Britain

Written by Mary S Lovell

In the years between the two world wars, especially during the Great Depression, public opinion was divided between those who believed fascism could help solve the problems besetting Europe, and those who espoused socialism as the solution. Belief in these disparate ideologies was often the cause of irreparable rifts between families.

Lord Redesdale was probably more affected than most, for his home, Asthall Manor in rural Oxfordshire, was the site of pitched battles of internecine warfare. Hammers and sickles and swastikas were etched into his windows with diamond rings, appropriate flags flew either side of the schoolroom down the middle of which a line had been painted, and posters and cuttings of political heroes were attached to the walls, much as today's teenagers display pop idols.

David Mitford, Lord Redesdale, was known as 'Farve' to his six daughters - Nancy, Pam, Diana, Unity, Decca and Debo. They all believed they were barely educated, though they received an average education for aristocratic girls. Their only brother, Tom, was sent to boarding school at eight, naturally ("It's different for Tom. Tom's a boy!") but education for all the sisters began with the three Rs taught by their mother, 'Mum'. Her expectations were fairly simple. By six, each had to be capable of reading aloud The Times leader and producing accounts to explain how they spent their pocket money.

Once this hurdle had been achieved, they were duly turned over to a series of governnesses, and although occasionally some of these teachers introduced a spot of shoplifting or a card game of Racing Demon into the curriculum, in the main the girls were urged to develop their ideas by extra-curricular reading and discussion. Fortunately, the girls had one of the finest libraries in the country in their home - inherited from their grandfather - and were encouraged to read freely. At first they enjoyed tales of adventure, but when the great debate began, 12-year-old Decca was likely to be found reading Beverly Nichols' indictment of war Cry Havoc while Unity quoted from Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf. They devoured newspapers and joined in lively debate at dinner - although on one night each week when they were allowed to speak only French, the sisters recalled it was strangely quiet.

Nancy, the eldest child, was 16 by the time the youngest, Deborah (Debo), made an appearance in 1920, and so had the different outlook that was natural between an Edwardian child and one born into the newly minted world of the flapper, motor cars and women's suffrage. She was an adult and Debo was scarcely into double figures when the ideological rivalry first sprang up between their teenage sisters. At the time, Unity and Jessica (Decca) were expanding their self-education and expounded passionate opinions in the linen cupboard - the warmest place to be when
**WHO WERE THE MITFORDS?**

David Freeman-Mitford, 2nd Baron Redesdale 1878-1958
'Farve' upon whom Nancy based her fictional character 'Uncle Matthew'. The Mitfords are a family of landed gentry from Northumberland.

Sydney Bowles 1880-1963
Long-suffering 'Muv' was the daughter of Conservative MP and journalist Thomas Gibson Bowles, who founded Vanity Fair magazine, and may have been from whom the literary sisters gained their strong story-writing abilities.

Nancy 1904-73
The eldest Mitford sister was a brilliant, perceptive and successful writer, but often cruel in her wit when writing about the family. She was destined never to marry the love of her life, a Free French officer named Gaston Palewski.

Pamela 1907-94
The least known of the Mitford sisters was the quiet one who loved the countryside, and was adored by the poet John Betjeman. As an adult, she had her Aga painted to match the brilliant blue of her eyes.

Diana 1910-2003
The beauty who alienated her family when she fell in love with Oswald Mosley, and espoused his extreme right-wing ideology. Highly intelligent and fiercely loyal, she also became a bestselling writer.

Unity 1914-48
Idolised Adolf Hitler and became his friend because she could make him laugh and relax as no one else could. A failed suicide attempt left her brain damaged. Ideologically opposed to Decca though they loved each other.

Jessica 'Decca' 1917-96
The family rebel who became a leading communist in the USA. Unlikely author of one of the most amusing books on the Mitfords, she also wrote serious journalism and was an incredibly successful writer.

Deborah 'Debo' 1920-2014
When her husband succeeded to the dukedom, they inherited millions and turned the neglected Chatsworth estate into a thriving success. She was an acclaimed writer who charmed everyone.

As arguments swirled between the teenagers, other members of the family became embroiled. The older sisters - Nancy, Pam and Diana - had their own beliefs. By then Nancy was part of a smart Oxford-educated literary set (the 'Brideshead bunch'), with fashionable leftist values. Pam was scarcely concerned with politics and was far more interested in the breeding lines of pedigree cows. Diana, however - the beauty of the family, already engaged to Bryan Guinness, heir of the uber-rich brewing family - was focusing on her trouseau and learning how to run her own establishment.

She thought that when you looked at what was happening in Germany under Chancellor Hitler, and what had occurred in Russia under Stalin, fascism was probably the more palatable of the two. Horse-mad Debo could never see what all the fuss was about. All she cared about at the time was hunting with the Heythrop Hunt as often as she could since she had a crush on the bachelor master. When told that he was to be married, she fainted.

As the 1920s gave way to the 1930s, things were changing for the sisters. Diana's ruptuals started a rash of engagements - both Nancy and Pam accepted proposals that came to nothing but
"Unity's uncritical persistence led to her becoming a regular member of Hitler's off-duty inner circle"

provoked discussion by the younger girls about their own ambitions for the future. Unity declared she intended to go to Germany and meet Hitler. Decca insisted she would run away and become a communist, and Debo thought she would rather like to marry a duke. To prepare, Decca opened a 'Running Away Account' at Farve's bank.

It was a few years later that everything turned bitter. Diana's previously happy marriage hit the rocks when she met and fell hopelessly in love with the firebrand politician Oswald Mosley. The ambitious Mosley was also married to the daughter of an earl, and he would not leave his wife, so Diana left Bryan and lived as Mosley's part-time mistress in a flat in Eton Square. The sisters were banned from seeing this social pariah, although they sometimes visited secretly. But the important factor of this relationship was that Mosley had already begun his swing to the far right of politics, and Diana - besotted - swung with him, so that she and Unity became politically aligned in the great debate between the sisters. When the sisters visited Germany in 1933, Diana and Unity attended the Nuremburg Rally, were mesmerised by Hitler's performance and the fanaticism of his followers (which seemed to be 'everybody'), and duly agreed this was Europe's salvation. Diana felt Mosley would benefit from some of Hitler's techniques as an orator.

Unity persuaded Miv to allow her to spend a year in Munich learning German, rather than go to Paris for French lessons as her sisters had done. Setting out to fulfil her ambition to meet Hitler, she stalked him in her spare time. She discovered where he liked to eat and went there for lunch every day. After some months, when he had noticed her a few times, he asked an aide to enquire about the identity of this tall, slender, blonde and blue-eyed young woman who could have been a model for his ideal of Aryan womanhood, and she was invited to his table. It did not happen instantly, but Unity's uncritical persistence led to her becoming a regular member of Hitler's off-duty inner circle and friends with most of the Nazi high command. She was even part of the official train when Hitler swept into Austria after the Anschluss. The simple secret of Unity's success with him, according to Diana, was that she made him 'butter' (giggle), but his henchmen feared Unity's influence on their leader.
Decca, meanwhile, had made contact with the family black sheep, Esmond Romilly. He was the nephew of Winston Churchill’s wife Clementine (who was Farve’s first cousin) and at 17 was a year younger than Decca. He was an ardent communist for which, along with bad behaviour, he was expelled from school. Muv would never have allowed Decca to visit her aunt in Wiltshire had she known Esmond would be there. But he was, Decca, already half in love with Esmond before they met, agreed within hours of being introduced to marry him and run away to Spain to fight Franco’s fascists. Her running away fund came in handy.

They kept the elopement secret for some weeks, as it was believed Decca was on holiday with the family of a girl friend. When the truth came out, the story made headlines for a month while the underage runaways were pursued through France and Spain with rewards offered for information about them. It always helps if one can pull a few strings and Anthony Eden eventually supplied passage on a navy destroyer for family members to travel to face the errant couple in a squalid bedst in south-west France. But it was too late to stop the relationship; Decca was pregnant and so with serious misgivings by both families, they were allowed to marry. Muv was the only family member present.

When she returned home, Muv considered the disastrous family situation. Diana had now married Mosley at the home of Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels and his wife Magda. Hitler was the guest of honour. Unity was now close friends with Hitler and had written some highly contentious anti-Semitic articles in British and German newspapers, duly illustrated with images of Unity throwing smart Nazi salutes. These attracted much unfavourable comment and even more headlines. Decca was married to Esmond, whom the Redesdales loathed. “Why,” Muv wailed, “must all my daughters fall in love with dictators?”

By the time war broke out four years later, both Nancy and Pam had married, though not successfully. Pam never entered the political debate (though she was cross when animal food was rationed). Nancy had begun to write successfully, and had lined up politically with her elite left-wing chums. When Mosley was arrested and imprisoned under the infamous Rule 18B as a danger to the state along with ‘enemy aliens’, Nancy felt it was her ‘duty’ to inform on Diana. She called on a senior Home Office official and told him Diana was at least as dangerous as Mosley, “if not more,” for Diana, like Unity, had become a friend of Hitler. As a consequence, Diana, who was breastfeeding her 12-week-old baby when arrested, spent most of the war in Holloway Prison without charge or trial.

Unity, because of her family connections to Churchill and other influential British government figures, as well as her unique friendship with Hitler, had come to believe it was her raison d’être to prevent war between the two countries she loved. When she failed to do so, she walked into a park near her flat in Munich and shot herself in the head with a pistol given to her by Hitler. By a miracle (“a matter of millimetres,” said the doctors) she did not die. She was given first-class treatment organised and paid for by Hitler, and with the help of Prime Minister Churchill (strings again), Muv managed to get permission for herself and Debo to travel through wartime Europe to meet the private hospital train, also provided by Hitler, that conveyed Unity to Calais where she was taken onto a cross-Channel ferry. Unity survived her suicide attempt, but she was seriously brain-damaged, and died eight years later from meningitis associated with her head wound.

Decca and Esmond had fled to the USA after their baby died of measles, but Esmond joined the air force when war was declared and returned to England. He was killed during a bombing raid and Decca’s second child was born shortly after. She eventually remarried and, with her second husband, Bob, carried on the fight for communism in the USA, becoming a leading communist and freedom fighter. Suspected as a ringleader, she was questioned in the McCarthy witch-hunt trials and probably escaped a conviction only by hiding out for months. Inexplicably, although she now hated Diana, Decca always loved Unity and forgave her allegiance to Hitler. She said Unity’s death was one of the most traumatic things in her life (the deaths of her baby and Esmond being the others).

After the war – during which their brother Tom was killed in action – things settled down between the sisters, and Diana once said it wasn’t until she
had read The Mitford Girls that she realised quite how much Nancy and Decca had come to hate her. Had Nancy joined in the “what I want to be when I grow up” conversation, she would indubitably have said: “A successful writer.” She certainly achieved that, but her parents were hurt by some of her characterisations of them. She became rich from her novels and her work is never out of print.

Debo, too, went on to achieve her childhood ambition. In 1941, she married Andrew Cavendish, younger son of the Duke of Devonshire. He was not destined to inherit but when his elder brother, Billy, was killed in the war, Andrew became the heir and eventually succeeded to the dukedom. Together, in a marriage that lasted over 60 years until his death in 2004, Debo and Andrew transformed a debt ridden estate into a hugely successful business that is present-day Chatsworth House in Derbyshire.

Curiously, for six children who considered themselves inadequately educated, four of them became bestselling writers – Nancy, Diana, Decca and Debo. But perhaps long-suffering Muv should have the last word on these remarkable sisters who drained the last dregs from the 20th century. “Whenever I see a headline beginning with ‘Peer’s daughter,’” she once famously remarked, “I know that one of you children has been in trouble.”
Great citadel
The outer wall of the 18th-century citadel was nine metres high and six metres thick. It offered superb fighting positions for communist troops. In the first three days of the battle, the Marines refrained from using naval gunfire, air strikes and long-range artillery support to limit damage to the citadel.

Tank cannon
The M48A3 90mm main gun was the only ground-combat weapons system the Marines fielded in the first phase of the battle that was not matched by the NVA. It was used to blast communist strongpoints and bunkers established among buildings and residences in both sections of the city. The tanks drew heavy fire from the enemy throughout the urban battle, resulting in high casualties among tank crews.

Armour-infantry teams
Tanks spearheaded the advance through rubble-strewn streets with flak-vested infantry fire teams crouching behind them for cover. South Vietnamese troops and US Marines had to painstakingly retake Hue one block at a time. The Marines used tanks and recoilless rifles to blast holes in concrete buildings through which infantry teams could make their assaults.
The dark clouds, steady drizzle and boarded-up buildings heightened the sense of foreboding as the US Marines of Corporal Glenn Lucas’s point squad approached the Thuong Tu Gate to the Hue Citadel. As they drew closer, they were struck by a hailstorm of fire from soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in concealed positions along the fortress wall and inside the gate. Half of the men in the squad were knocked to the ground. The Marines returned fire with machine guns. Commander Captain Charles Meadows received permission to abort the mission from Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Gravel, but it would take the Marines two hours to safely pull back to the Nguyen Hoang Bridge.

Earlier that afternoon, Gravel had been ordered to lead two companies of Marines across the only remaining intact bridge over the Perfume River – which divided the city into northern and southern parts. Their objective was to link up with the beleaguered personnel from the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) 1st Infantry Division headquarters, trapped in the north-east corner. The following day, ARVN relief forces reached their fellow soldiers in the citadel from the north. It would be more than ten days before the Marines returned to the citadel.

The communist offensive occurred on the Vietnamese New Year holiday, Tet, to give them the element of surprise when they struck Hue, the third largest city. Aware of the overwhelming strength of the US military forces, the communists knew they would only be able to hold Hue for a short amount of time, but because it was the historical heart and soul of South Vietnam, the attack had great propaganda value.

In the early hours of 31 January, the 6th Regiment of the NVA captured the citadel on the north bank of the Perfume River, and the 4th Regiment seized the south side. Despite their impressive whirlwind attack, the communists made several key mistakes on the first day. They not only failed to overrun the ARVN headquarters unit and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) compound, but they also failed to seal off Route 1 so that US Marine forces at Phu Bai Combat Base 13 kilometres away could not quickly reach the south side.

The ARVN and US Marine Corps forces began counterattacking from their respective perimeters on 4 February. On 11 February, at the request of the South Vietnamese, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, deployed by boat and helicopter to the northern end of the citadel to assist ARVN forces in clearing the last enemy troops from the citadel.

As the battle drew to a close, ARVN forces were given the honour of retaking the Imperial Palace inside the citadel and replacing the Viet Cong banner on the main flagpole with the South Vietnamese flag. After the battle, the mass graves of 2,800 civilians executed by the Viet Cong during the occupation were discovered. For the South Vietnamese, Hue was a dark chapter in a long war.
**General Vo Nguyen Giap**

**Leader**
The defence minister masterminded the Tet Offensive in hopes of inciting an uprising in South Vietnam.

**Strengths**
- Struck cultural centre of Hue with overwhelming strength.

**Weakness**
- Mistakenly believed that NVA commanders were as skilled as the US commanders.

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**North Vietnamese Regulars**

**Key Unit**
The North Vietnamese were well supplied in the early stage of the battle because sympathisers had stockpiled food and ammunition.

**Strengths**
- High morale and a willingness to die fighting for the reunification of Vietnam.

**Weakness**
- Suffered from deprivation and diseases, such as malaria, living in primitive conditions in the jungles of South Vietnam.

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**RPG-2**

**Key Weapon**
The hand-held, rocket-propelled grenade launcher gave NVA and VC soldiers the ability to knock out enemy armoured vehicles and strongpoints.

**Strengths**
- Rugged and very easy to operate.

**Weakness**
- Only accurate at short distances.

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**Greatest Battles**

01 **Night assault on the citadel**

At 3.30am on 31 January 1968, three battalions of North Vietnamese soldiers storm into the citadel from the north and west through three gates. Their objectives are the Tay Loc Airfield and the Mang Ca compound, which houses the headquarters of the 1st South Vietnamese Division. To support the surprise attack, 122mm rockets scream down on targets throughout the city. By the end of the first day, the communists will control 60 per cent of the citadel.

02 **Attack on the south side**

The 804th NVA Battalion supported by Viet Cong militia simultaneously strikes the newer, triangular-shaped residential portion of Hue south of the Perfume River also under cover of darkness on the morning of 31 January. The communists attack the local headquarters of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, where 500 US technical personnel defend their compound against attacks by communist troops armed with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and automatic rifles.

03 **Convoy ambush**

A company of Marines from Phu Bai Combat Base heads towards Hue in trucks in a response to request for support from the MACV compound. On the way, they link up with four M48 tanks. As the convoy approaches Hue, it is pinned down on the southern outskirts of the city by heavy fire from North Vietnamese regulars. A fresh company of Marines is sent to reinforce the beleaguered company. The 300 Marines won't reach the compound until the afternoon.

04 **Firefight at Nguyen Hoang Bridge**

Company G of the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, receives orders in the late afternoon of the first day to cross an intact bridge over the Perfume River and link up with the South Vietnamese surrounded by communist forces. The bridge is too light to support the tanks, so they furnish covering power from the south bank. During a two-hour firefight, the hard-fighting Marines cross the river, but fierce enemy fire drives them back. Of 150 Marines engaged, one-third are casualties.

05 **South Vietnamese Forces Rally**

Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong requests help from units of the 1st Division of the ARVN near Hue on behalf of the beleaguered divisional headquarters inside the citadel. All of the units responding suffer heavy losses fighting their way through enemy forces in an effort to reach the headquarters. Once they arrive, they recapture Tay Loc Airfield.
**Battle of Hue**

**10 Recapture of the emperor's palace**
ARVN Black Panther rangers clear the Imperial Palace of communist troops. On 24 February, the rangers replace the Viet Cong flag that has flown at the main gate for 25 days with the South Vietnamese flag.

**09 Marines to the rescue**
The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, arrives in the citadel on 11 February to clear the eastern half of the sprawling fortress. One of the most daunting tasks they face is clearing the enemy from the archway tower in the north-eastern wall.

**08 Fighting in the citadel**
Elite South Vietnamese troops go toe-to-toe with the North Vietnamese regulars inside the citadel in early February. When the South Vietnamese capture the northwest wall of the citadel on 4 February, the North Vietnamese launch a successful counterattack.

**07 Air Cavalry blocking attack**
Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade of the US Army's 1st Air Cavalry Division land west of Hue on 3 February with orders to cut the communist supply line to depots running west from Hue to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They become entangled in heavy combat with entrenched communist forces.

**06 Marine counterattack in south Hue**
A force of 1,000 US Marines fights block by block to clear the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong from the south side of the city. The Marines are supported by M48 tanks, trucks armed with quad .50 machine guns and a low-silhouette tracked vehicle called an Ontos with a turret supporting two arms, each of which holds three recoiless rifles. Although the Marines clear Hue's south side of large-scale communist forces by 10 February, they continue to conduct sweeps against snipers.

**05 BRIGADIER GENERAL FOSTER C LAHUE, USMC LEADER**
The assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division.
**Strengths** Pressed the attack despite stifling rules of engagement.
**Weakness** Underestimated the enemy threat and fed reinforcements piecemeal.

**US MARINES KEY UNIT**
The US Marines were entrusted with helping defend against communist insurgency.
**Strengths** The elite Marines excelled at offensive operations.
**Weakness** Hampered by rules of engagement that initially prohibited artillery and air support in an effort to spare civilians.

**M48A3 PATTON TANK KEY WEAPON**
Spearheaded attacks through the city protecting infantry squads.
**Strengths** Capable of knocking out strongpoints with its 90mm cannon.
**Weakness** Unable to operate on some narrow streets inside the citadel and vulnerable to RPGs.
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What if... The Entente had marched on Berlin in 1918?

In late 1918, the Allied powers declined to advance on the kaiser’s capital. How could things have changed had they gone ahead?

Written by Michael Haskew

What if... 

The Allies advance. Drive across the old battlefields of Flanders, through Belgian Walonia and on to Liege, pausing briefly to resupply. Crossing the German frontier, the British encounter diminishing resistance from the enemy and complete the ejection of German forces from northern France and Belgium.

South of the British advance, French troops move into Alsace, threatening the German left flank as Ludendorff retires across the River Rhine. Meanwhile, American forces under General John Pershing race for the crossings of the River Meuse near Sedan. Fighting is heavy, but weather hampers the Allied offensive. By late December, British, French and American forces consolidate their front, drawing up along the west bank of the Rhine, poised to renew their offensive the following spring.

On 12 March 1919, the Allies, under the unified command of French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, launch the final offensive to capture Berlin. Rapidly crossing the Rhine, the British occupy the Ruhr, Germany’s industrial heartland, and march into Cologne. The Americans jump off near the German city of Koblenz at the confluence of the Rhine and its tributary, the Moselle. Their advance on Frankfurt meets light resistance, and the city falls within days. Victory in the Twelve Days’ Battles shatters German resistance.

British forces sweep across the plain of northern Germany to the gates of Berlin. A brief squabble develops among the Allied commanders for the honour of taking the German capital, however, when Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates on 20 April, Berlin is declared an open city.

The Allies formally occupy Berlin the following day, enacting martial law and quelling the unrest between communist and right-wing paramilitary groups. Occupation zones are established, and a provisional German government is given limited autonomy. A decade of military occupation follows, and only when a democratic German government is deemed stable are Allied troops withdrawn.

How would it be different?

- Armistice refused. The Allies outright reject the first German request for an armistice, demanding unconditional surrender. The Germans refuse. 4 October 1918
- The Allies advance. Allied soldiers cross into German territory after pushing the Germans back from defensive positions along the Franco-German frontier. 10 December 1918
- Continued fighting. Heavy losses are sustained on both sides as guerrilla-style war against the Allies continues while German troop formations begin to disintegrate. Civil unrest grows across Germany as communist and right-wing factions collide. 16 December 1918
- Wilhelm pushed out. A provisional government is established in Berlin, and Kaiser Wilhelm II has virtually no continuing role in the conduct of the war. 31 December 1918
- Attempted coup in Berlin. Communist revolutionaries stage an attempt to overthrow the provisional German government, seizing numerous buildings in Berlin. Troops of the right-wing Freikorps quell the uprising with force. 6 January 1919

Michael Haskew has researched and written on military history topics for more than 30 years. He has contributed to numerous books and periodicals and is the author of more than 20 books on historical subjects, including West Point 1915: Eisenhower, Bradley, And The Class The Stars Fell On, and De Gaulle: Lessons In Leadership From The Defiant General.
What if…

THE ENTENTE HAD MARCHED ON BERLIN IN 1918?

Germans begin to crumble
During the so-called Twelve Days’ Battles, Allied troops destroy the remnants of three German armies, and organised enemy resistance rapidly wanes. 12-24 March 1919

The Allies smell victory
Allied commanders meet in Pershing’s field headquarters as their forces approach Berlin. A squabble ensues as to whose command will be the first to enter the capital. 9 April 1919

Berlin is taken
In a compromise, a multinational Allied contingent is escorted into Berlin by a delegation of provisional government officials. Negotiations conclude with the surrender of the German capital. 21 April 1919

Martial law enacted
Although the campaign has been costly, the capture of Berlin is virtually bloodless. The Allies impose martial law, arresting the leaders of prominent communist and right-wing factions. 30 April 1919

Occupation begins
Germany is divided into British, French, and American occupation zones. The provisional German government is given limited autonomy, and a decade of occupation follows. 21 May 1919

Allied colours fly from the Brandenburg Gate as German soldiers surrender their weapons

© Ian Hinley
On 24 June 1729, all of Florence was abuzz celebrating the Feast Day of Saint John the Baptist – the city’s most important religious festival. As usual the day was filled with drinking, dancing and the famous Palio horse race bursting through the city streets and into the surrounding countryside. Puncturing this frivolity was the occasional solemn prayer or frenzied procession in and out of the city’s grand churches.

Into this scene crept a solitary ornate closed carriage, bearing the gilded symbol of Florence’s ruler: six circles arranged on a golden shield – the Medici coat of arms. Winding its way through the streets, curious citizens could hear a low murmuring from within, as though some
sickly creature were suffering a slow and torturous death. Occasionally the carriage would stop, the door would swing open and a grimacing, powdered face would appear from the gloomy interior.

After turning a tired gaze across the faces of perplexed onlookers, the man heaved forward and vomited, his large wig quivering on its perch as he did so. This was Gian Gastone de’ Medici, the grand duke of Tuscany, meeting his people. Eight years later he would be dead, and along with him the once noble and powerful Medici dynasty.

Towards the end of his life, the grand duke rarely appeared in public, preferring the solitude and comforts of his magnificent residence, the Pitti Palace, than the burden of ruling Tuscany. When he did appear, as on the feast day that June, his sickly complexion and often-profane behaviour were shocking - his wretched condition reflecting the lamentable waning of the Medicis, as well as Florence’s fortunes.

Although Gian Gastone was the last Medici grand duke, the dynasty had long been in decline from its former greatness. As rulers over the Renaissance’s birthplace, the family had been among the greatest supporters of the genius artists and scholars the era produced, including Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. This was no exception with Gian Gastone’s father and predecessor, Cosimo III, who continued the family tradition of collecting vast quantities of art, as well as patronising the city’s talent, including the famous sculptor Giovanni Battista Foggini.

However, Cosimo’s rule over Tuscany was far from artful, and his tenure saw a large number of severe laws, taxes and fines enacted. Many other laws brought upon a harsher treatment of the Jewish population – working for or even sleeping with a Jew was punishable by a heavy fine or prison sentence. Prostitutes could even face a whipping in the street for having sex with a Jew, and this wasn’t the only sanction they were forced to work around. Licences to solicit in the street came at a price of six crowns a year, while countless additional bribes were necessary to avoid harassment by the ominously named ‘Office of Public Decency’. As well as raking in capital from prostitutes, Cosimo also sold off monopolies to the city traders, before selling bypasses to those monopolies at an even greater price.

Capital punishment was almost a daily spectacle in Cosimo’s Florence, with more than 2000 executions carried out in one year alone. Everything from sodomy to murder was punishable by beheading, with the latter followed up with the grisly quartering of the criminal’s body for good measure. Even the innocent act of courtship was criminalised by Cosimo, with men forbidden to ‘dally at doors and windows by night’ - those caught in coitus with a woman they shouldn’t be cavorting with were subjected to torture sessions in the state dungeons.

The prince gambled away fortunes during the trip, and what he wasn’t spending on cards he was drinking away in seedy bars”

However, Cosimo’s attempt to tie a strong moralistic noose around the necks of Florence’s fornicators, while withdrawing extra dividends for the state, was ultimately a failure, and this was embodied in none other than his eldest son and heir, Ferdinando. The grand prince was not only highly promiscuous, but also had a preference for pretty young men, as well as many talented singers and musicians of both sexes. He lavished gifts upon his lovers, and like all good Medicis that had come before him, he was a highly generous patron, himself a talented musician and composer. From a young age he was able to play any piece of music presented to him from sight, to near perfection, and much of his time was spent organising recitals and operas, always with the utmost style and at a triple-A budget.

What did not grip the grand prince, or even mildly interest him, were the matters of state - nor producing a Medici heir to rule that state. In 1696, he returned from a festival in Venice with a new young noble mistress, and venereal disease, both to the consternation of his wife, Violante. Long before his eldest son’s premature death in 1713, Cosimo had already determined he would have to look elsewhere to secure the Medici line.

Unfortunately, Cosimo’s remaining son seemed even less likely to provide an heir than the dead Ferdinando. Not only was Gian Gastone not interested in women, he was actively repulsed by his wife, Anna Maria Franziska of Saxe-Lauenburg, and she by him. After being forced into the marriage on 2 July 1697, the couple had moved to Anna Maria’s remote home in Bohemia, a small
The last of the Medici

town called Reichstadt, where the young prince became utterly depressed and withdrawn. In later life he would wholly blame his sister, Anna Maria Luisa, Electress Palatine, who was a most enthusiastic instigator of the match.
The last of the Medici

certain days they wandered begging from door to door. In this wide preserve Giuliano could always hunt for amorous game and introduce some new and comely morsel to the Prince.”

The memoir goes on to detail how the revellers indulged to excess, always at Gian Gastone’s expense as well as at his encouragement. The prince gambled away fortunes during the trip, and what he wasn’t spending on cards he was drinking away in seedy bars. Often, it was said, “...he ran in peril of his life. Setting forth in disguise he would join the ribald company of wretches that lolled about half-drunk in low haunts and taverns of the town.” Caught up in the chaotic melee of alcohol-infused brawls, Gian Gastone would, “...put up with blows, pistol shots and sword cuts.”

Eventually, of course, the trip came to an end once the money ran out. Cosimo wrote to the prince, commanding him to return to his estranged wife in Reichstadt. His escapades in Prague had certainly revived Gian Gastone’s spirit, though they had decayed his physical appearance and set in place a hedonistic pattern that would define the rest of his life. To quote Acton, after returning from the capital, Gian Gastone’s “features began to settle into that monstrous mould of which we may see a likeness in the Uffizi Gallery.”

On 31 October 1723, after a prolonged illness, Cosimo III died in the presence of his confessor. In the hours up until his end he had been attended by numerous clergy and the archbishop of Pisa, who all pronounced blessings to send his soul on its final journey. He had reigned for 53 years, the longest of any Medici grand duke, and now left behind him a state of near chaos.

With no clear line of succession beyond Gian Gastone and his sister Anna Maria Luisa, the great powers of Europe hungrily vied for position over the Tuscan duchy. But the Medici prince remained as uninterested in the affairs of state and inheritance as he had ever been. He did, however, repeal many of the harshest laws and taxes enforced by his predecessor, as well as a curious payment known as the ‘Pension of the Creed’, which offered cash incentives to Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity. Now in his 50s and with no impediment to check him, he set about living for his own desires.

Gian Gastone’s daily routine thereby became one dedicated to pleasure. Waking at around midday, he would receive official visitors while sat up in bed, at least those visitors who had filled Giuliano Dami’s purse with enough crowns. Remaining in bed for the rest of the day, he would then take dinner at 5pm and supper at 2am. Between these hours was about the time he would be joined by the latest addition to the Tuscan court – the Ruspanti.

Named after the low-value coin – the ruspi – that was used to pay them for their service, the Ruspanti were a band of young men, as well as some women, recruited from Florence’s streets by Dami to entertain the grand duke. One account describes them: “It mattered not from what gang of vagrant knaves and mongrels, unruly and unclean, provided they were graced with an alluring eye and the countenance of an Adonis.”

Now the master of the Pitti Palace, and with no authority to stop him, Gian Gastone revived the excessive and lascivious habits that he had picked up during his time in Prague, with the help of the Ruspanti. Reclining in his bed, covered with snuff and throwing back wine like it were water, Gian Gastone would order the Ruspanti to tease, insult and even assault him – all for his own particular entertainment. The Ruspanti also performed sexual acts with one another, as well as with the grand duke, for his own pleasure and amusement. Grand dinners would also be held regularly, during which each of the Ruspanti guests were renamed after the great statesmen and clergy of Florence, and Gian Gastone would address each of them as though they were nobility.
Gradually, the Ruspanti grew in number - eventually comprising upwards of 400 members - and the grand duke spent his time with practically no one else, all the while remaining in the confinement of his bedchamber. His sister-in-law, Violante, who was left with the daily running of the state in his absence, made efforts to force him back into the public eye, but these were to no avail. On one such occasion, she arranged a great banquet, inviting all the important aristocrats of the duchy and beyond to the Lappeggi Palace to meet with Gian Gastone, though this was to be a disaster.

Not long into the meal, Gian Gastone, "...got incapably drunk, swearing and belching as he ate his food, making occasional comments of indescribable lewdness." Swaying back and forth at the table, while gentlemen and ladies recoiled in horror and disgust, he then suddenly raised a napkin to his mouth and promptly vomited into it. Gazing carelessly around the stunned gathering and chuckling, the grand duke then, "...wiped his mouth with the tumbling curls of his wig," before continuing to dine as though nothing had occurred. The room was hastily vacated.

This humiliation was repeated on that Feast Day in 1729, which was also the grand duke's final appearance in public. After eventually falling into a drunken stupor among the festivities, his servants carried him back to the Pitti Palace, where he would largely remain for the rest of his life, with his Ruspanti for company.

By 1737, one noble foreign visitor noted that the Tuscan duke was, "...in a pitiable condition... He could not get out of bed; he had a long beard; his sheets were very dirty." The duke's bedchamber by this point was so filthy and odorous from his permanent occupancy that his servants filled it with fresh roses every day to mask the stench and save the senses of occasional visitors.

On 10 July that same year, Gian Gastone lay ill, dying, and after desperate pleas from his relatives, accepted a priest to hear his last confession in an attempt to redeem his soul. Greeting Prior Ippoito Rosselli, the local Florentine priest brought to him, the duke uttered: "You see, we all must die." Then, after some hours, the last of the Medici line expired as a deathbed repentant.

Cosimo III was a much sterner ruler than his son. He left Tuscany as one of the poorest areas in Europe.

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Cosimo III was a much sterner ruler than his son. He left Tuscany as one of the poorest areas in Europe.

Florence faded
Since its golden period under Cosimo I and Lorenzo de' Medici, Florence had notably declined in spirit by the time the dynasty drew its final breath. "[The city] is much sunk from what it was, for they do not reckon there are above 50,000 souls in it," wrote one foreign visitor. By the time Gian Gastone succeeded his father, many Grand Tourists noted how the streets were packed mostly with either priests or peasants. Among the grand duke's first acts was to accommodate the poor with alms and workhouses, but this did little to solve the problem.

Harassed for decades by moralistic agents of the state, as well as impatient tax collectors, the entire population had become weary, paranoid and almost destitute during Cosimo III's tenure. "The declining state of this city is very visible," wrote another visitor. "It is not very populous, nor are the inhabitants useful, the clergy making up the bulk of the people... The sick and infirm must also be very numerous where there are so many aged persons."

After the death of the last Medici grand duke in 1737, Tuscany passed into the possession of Francis Stephen, duke of Lorraine. Tuscany and Florence was no longer a powerful, independent realm, but a mere branch of the Habsburg Empire - in time, Francis Stephen became not only archduke of Austria, but also Holy Roman emperor. Before long, the Medici coat of arms was ripped from the fascias of Florence's buildings - an act symbolising the end of an era.

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From steam power to high-speed engines, trains have come a long way since they first began transporting goods and people.

**PENYDARREN LOCOMOTIVE 1803**

Steam-power pioneer Richard Trevithick built the world’s first locomotive to run on rails. After engineering the high-pressure steam engine, he was employed by Penydarren ironworks to develop a locomotive that could transport iron and coal from mines in the Welsh valleys. Ironmaster Samuel Homfray was so confident it could be done that he bet a rival 500 guineas that it could carry ten tons of iron along a 15-kilometre railway, and about four hours later, the Penydarren locomotive had done it.

**THE ROCKET 1829**

Robert Stephenson’s Rocket was built two and a half decades after Trevithick’s first test rail locomotive. In that same year, the Rainhill Trials saw six engines compete to determine which was the greatest. The Rocket steamed to victory, completing more than 112 kilometres hauling varying weights. The Rocket had more tubes producing steam than its competitors, better pistons and other advantages that helped propel it to first place, and straight into the history books as one of Stephenson’s greatest achievements.

**FIRST UNDERGROUND RAILWAY 1863**

To combat the increasing traffic in London, transport routes were built underground. The Metropolitan Railway opened the first underground route for passengers in 1863. Despite the steamy and smoky conditions, the service was overcrowded and carriages had to be borrowed from Great Western to accommodate all the passengers. The first underground carriages had gas lamps so as to “dispel any unpleasant feelings which passengers, especially ladies, might entertain against riding for so long a distance through a tunnel.”

**THE TOM THUMB 1830**

The Baltimore & Ohio railway had been chartered in 1828, but was using horse-drawn carriages rather than steam. When the animals became unable to shoulder the heavy loads over long distances, steam, proving popular in England, seemed a viable alternative. To test the idea, American inventor Peter Cooper crafted a coal-powered engine. In August 1830, it pulled a carriage of passengers and reached speeds of 28 kilometres per hour.

**A model of the first locomotive to pull a load along rails**

**A replica of Robert Stephenson’s Rocket, built in 1829**

**Richard Trevithick ENGLISH 1771-1833**

Trevithick was a gifted engineer who began working in ore mines in 1790. Seeing steam as a viable alternative to coal in the transport of ores, he designed steam engines and, later, the first steam railway locomotive. Trevithick wasn’t interested in fame and fortune and later returned to constructing engines for pumping water.

**The Metropolitan Railway’s first underground trains were busy and smoky**

**LOCOMOTION NO. 1 1825**

This simplistically named engine played a large part in the evolution of trains as we know them today. It was the first purpose-built public passenger train, engineered by George Stephenson’s company, to premiere on the Stockton and Darlington line. The Locomotion No. 1 made its debut in 1825 at a grand ceremonial opening, which included several men on horses riding ahead of the engine, carrying flags with mottos such as ‘Periculum privatum utilitas publica,’ translating to ‘The private danger is the public good.’ The train of wagons pulled around 600 passengers.

**THE Locomotion No. 1 is now housed in the Darlington railway museum**

**A replica of the first locomotive to pull a load along rails**

**A model of the first locomotive to pull a load along rails**
ARMOURED TRAINS 1860s

Offering high speeds and sturdy engines, trains being armed for war was a natural step in transport evolution. They were used in late-19th-century conflicts including the Boer War and the American Civil War, as well as World War I and II. In World War I, the British equipped a train at Crewe with a quick-firing gun and half-armour plating. In World War II, armoured trains were developed and used by Poland, Nazi Germany and Russia. They would often carry cannons and machine guns as well as other powerful weapons.

THE MALLARD 1938

The advancement of air and road travel meant that by the 1930s, the railways needed to offer faster, more comfortable services in order to compete. The LNER A4 Mallard was the embodiment of this, with its wedge-shaped front designed to pull smoke away from the cab. But the Mallard’s most enduring achievement was breaking the record for reaching the highest speed of any steam locomotive in July 1938, when it travelled at an impressive 202 kilometres per hour. The record still stands today.

“We The Rainhill Trials saw six engines compete to determine which was the greatest. The Rocket steamed to victory”

INTERCITY 125 1977

Introduced to British public railways in 1976, these trains were a sleek alternative to those that had gone before, which had comparatively artless rectangular designs. The InterCity was aerodynamic, based on racing car designs, and made from moulded plastic instead of sheet metal. It could reach speeds of over 200 kilometres per hour, and is also known as the HST or High Speed Train. Many InterCity models are still in use in the UK’s rail fleets today, but most are to be replaced by the Japanese Hitachi Class 800 passenger trains in 2017.

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The fate of Paris is decided in a titanic battle between the brothers Ragnar and Rollo.
Vikings: THE TRUTH

Discover how Michael Hirst, creator of the hit TV show Vikings, brought the terror of the Northmen to life in his epic series.

Charting the voyages and adventures of the warrior Ragnar Lodbrok and his motley band of followers, Vikings cunningly interweaves myth and history to create an adventure for our time. The Vikings were Scandinavian raiders who unleashed terror across Europe and the Mediterranean for more than 300 years, from the late 8th century to the 11th century, in what is known as the Viking Age. Nowhere was safe from these fierce pagans as they sacked monasteries, cities – including Paris – and colonised parts of England, Scotland, Ireland and France.

The creator of Vikings, Michael Hirst, is no stranger to historical drama. Penning the award-winning, bodice-ripping series The Tudors and the biographical film Elizabeth, he has now turned his sights to Scandinavia to tell the story of this unique and often misrepresented group. Four series in, we spoke with Hirst to find out how he sorts the fact from the legend.

When writing a historical drama, accuracy is obviously extremely important. Have the facts ever stopped you from telling your story?

No, because that suggests that there is some sort of intrinsic opposition between facts and drama, and everything that I write starts with historical research. I spent a long time in universities, so for me the research part of [writing a script] is a joy and I read as much as I can. I read with an open mind, allowing characters and storylines to evolve. As the poet Dryden said, “The act of creativity is ideas and thoughts tumbling over each other in the darkness.”

I have a historical researcher called Justin Pollard who provides me with information, background and whatever else I need. What you’re looking for is authenticity and truthfulness, even in drama, so as the stories evolve I will always check with Justin whether it’s authentic, appropriate or reasonable to take the stories where I’m taking them. For instance, the sets are sourced from museums around the world that contain Viking artefacts, but it’s the Dark Ages and there is a hell of a lot we don’t know.

When we were working on the first season of Vikings, we showed some of the first episodes to the head of Scandinavian studies at Harvard University. He is a Swedish professor and I assumed that he would eat me alive, but he told me that this was the first time his culture has ever been taken seriously and intelligently. Vikings is the second biggest show across all Scandinavian countries, has reanimated an interest in Viking studies and encouraged a lot more archaeological digs.

The curator of the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo has told me that their visitor numbers have doubled because of the show, people are now proud of their ancestry again. I do have cause to think that it’s a pretty authentic show given that it’s a drama, and I’m very proud of that.

“What you’re looking for is authenticity and truthfulness, even in drama.”

Michael Hirst
Ragnar Lodbrok is perhaps the most famous Viking we have evidence for. How easy was it to separate the legendary figure of Ragnar from the historical one?

You can’t do that because Ragnar comes out of the sagas and history as a semi-legendary character. I deliberately chose a main character that was semi-mythical, whose reputation survived down the ages and was part of the oral tradition of Viking life. You want someone who is immensely charismatic, important and who other characters in the saga talk about. In a sense, I’m writing a saga about Ragnar Lodbrok, who becomes a legendary character in the show. What is important is that historical drama will reach more people than documentaries about the same period. Vikings is now the fifth biggest show in the world, so millions and millions and millions of people are watching it. They don’t have to all think, “This is real,” but what I hope and what I know happens is that it can develop a taste for the subject.

Is that what draws you to writing historical fiction? Does it have more value than a purely fictional show?

Yes it does, and that’s very important to me. It goes back to my school days when the only things I could do apart from sport were history and English, and I’ve combined them in my career. Personally I’ve never liked fantasy as, ultimately, anything can happen, which makes it meaningless. I’m writing about real people who changed the world and the way we live now. We shot the show just outside Dublin, where Viking longboats would have sailed along the coast. Connecting the past and the present in real terms is what I personally try to do. I used to hate those BBC historical dramas where the characters were like museum pieces, they never acted or spoke like human beings.

When I started writing Vikings I was told I wouldn’t be able to write a successful show because the Vikings were nasty people. They were the people who knocked down your door in the middle of the night and took your belongings - there was no way I could make people engage with them. My response was that first of all you don’t know very much about them, their culture and religion, and if I do my job right, that will engage you.

Here is a lead character, Ragnar, who thought that he was descended from the god Odin. Odin was not just the god of dead warriors in Valhalla, he was also the god of curiosity and purging, sacrificing an eye to look into the well of knowledge. My character goes exploring to other places in his boat, not to rape and plunder but for curiosity. He’s also a family man with children and a wife that he loves, and some of his issues stem from the fact he doesn’t get on with his boss.

“Connecting the past and the present in real terms is what I personally try to do”

Michael Hirst

How did you pass on your intimate knowledge of the Vikings to the actors so that they could get into the same headspace as you and give the best performances?

We do employ quite a lot of Scandinavian actors deliberately to root the show in some kind of

THE VIKING AGE

The series closely mirrors the true timeline of events

- Raid on Lindisfarne Monastery
  Season 1, Episode 2
- Vikings raid Northumbria
  Season 1, Episode 3
- Viking raid on Wessex
  Season 2, Episode 2
- King Egbert becomes ruler of Mercia
  Season 4, Episode 8
immediate reality. As this was a fresh look at the subject I didn’t want a hairy, clichéd Viking leader that the word ‘Viking’ itself brings to mind. What I was looking for was an introverted and thoughtful Viking, Travis Fimmel (who plays Ragnar) self-taped his audition from his kitchen and gave an incredibly sensitive reading of the material. The director and myself looked at the tape and thought, “Maybe it’s him.” Everyone else before that had been loud and shouty. They had interpreted the character as a dominant male whereas Travis absolutely captured my idea of Ragnar.

My idea for Lagertha was that here is someone who has had two children, fought in the shield wall and killed people. The casting directors would send us lots of images of beautiful actresses but we needed someone with the physicality to play a shield maiden. Katheryn Winnick is a black belt in taekwondo and karate, and this was a huge plus as I could give her scenes where she could be a believable Viking.

One of our favourite scenes was the portage of Ragnar’s fleet over land to engage Rollo’s fleet and the ensuing naval battle. How much of these scenes were CGI or were practical effects used?

We pride ourselves on trying to shoot with as much reality as we can. I still remember when Justin first told me about portage which was when Vikings would carry their boats over the mountains if they found a blocked river, which is scarcely believable. After I had written the sequence I went to production and said I know we can’t do this due to cost and logistical capability but they just said, “Leave it with us.”

I was overjoyed and immensely impressed when I walked up to the set and there was a Longship being hoisted up a cliff face. There was a modern crane at the top of the cliff for safety reasons but the actual pulley system was a reproduction of how the Vikings would have done it themselves. Our guys actually hauled the ship up the cliff, then dragged it through the wood. We had to use CGI sometimes, of course we do. The battle of Paris had something like 3,000 warriors and 300 ships, but we take great pride in how real the show is. Our actors fight, ride, swim and row - they love it.

*Vikings: Season 4, Part One* is available on Blu-ray™ and DVD, courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.
Some of Hitler’s biggest decisions during World War II were made while he was high on drugs. That’s the astonishing findings of a new book by German author Norman Ohler, which also reveals that drug abuse wasn’t just restricted to the Nazi leader, but was rife throughout the Third Reich.

Blitzed begins in what Ohler dubbs the ‘Chemical Twenties’ before Hitler came to power. These were the hedonistic days of the Weimar Republic, when Germany partied hard to forget the horror and humiliation of World War I. It was a time that also saw a boom in Germany’s pharmaceutical industry, which was a leading manufacturer of both cocaine and morphine.

When the Nazis grabbed power in 1933, they banned these ‘seductive poisons’, as they called them, on the grounds that they were decadent. The new Germany, they promised, would be as virtuous and pure as its new Führer – a clean-living, abstemious vegetarian who allowed no toxins, not even coffee, to enter his body. Drug users were declared criminally insane and shipped off to concentration camps, while the Nazis’ propaganda machine began linking drug abuse with the Jewish community, arguing for the eradication of both.

The Nazi Party portrayed itself as the country’s new moral guardians but in reality, as Ohler’s book reveals, it actually did little to eradicate widespread drug abuse, with cocaine, heroin and morphine being used by everyone from housewives and factory workers to the Führer’s inner circle.

Ohler’s claims about Hitler himself are backed up by the meticulously kept diary of his personal physician, Dr Theo Morrell. In the early days of the regime, Morrell would inject Hitler with vitamins and glucose shots. These kept Hitler’s energy levels almost supernaturally high while boosting his immune system so he never got ill. Once the war began, however, other substances started finding their way into Hitler’s bloodstream. Certainly by the time he took the fatal decision to invade Russia in 1941, steroids were in the mix. As the war progressed, and Germany started to lose, the concoctions became even more bizarre and powerful, including bull’s semen (to boost testosterone), Eukodol – a pharmacological cousin of heroin – and methamphetamine.

It wasn’t just Germany’s Führer who was using the latter. Known today as crystal meth, this highly addictive, psychosis-inducing amphetamine helped power the war effort on both the Home Front and in battle. Indeed when Hitler launched his Blitzkrieg against Poland in 1939 and then Western Europe the following year, many of his stormtroopers were rushing on a medically prescribed ‘pick-me-up’ called Pervitin, which was essentially methamphetamine. Millions of doses of this drug were administered to Nazi troops. Already hard-wired to murder by years of ideological education, many of them killed and died for Hitler’s racist crusade while, literally, out of their minds. WWII is much documented, but Ohler’s astonishing book sheds an entirely new light on the conflict.
CROWN OF BLOOD: 
THE DEADLY INHERITANCE OF LADY JANE GREY
The ultimate biography of the Nine Day Queen
Author Nicola Tallis Publisher Michael O’Mara Books Price £20 Released Out now

Lady Jane Grey has been consigned to the history books as scarcely more than a tragic victim of adult ambition. This in spite of the fact that she was fiercely intelligent - attracting attention from notable scholars from both England and on the continent - and so strong-willed and fervent in her religious beliefs that she was willing to die for her faith, and indeed did.

Still, the image that prevails when it comes to the Nine Day Queen is one of feminine helplessness, as depicted in Paul Delaroche’s iconic and idealised painting of her about to be executed. Dressed in white, the blindfolded Jane is guided to the block - the innocent usurper that’s often reduced to just a footnote.

After reading Crown Of Blood, however, you’ll be convinced that Jane and her family need their own BBC series. Political power plays, double-crossings and the curse of royal blood make for a fascinating tale; never has the teenage Tudor seemed more alive than within the pages of this biography. Historian Nicola Tallis draws upon a wealth of primary sources, focusing on the human and emotional aspects of Jane’s story, as well as the titular deadly inheritance.

Possessing royal blood through her grandmother, Princess Mary Tudor, Jane was named heir to the throne in Henry VIII’s will - if his children died childless - and there lay an opportunity for the power-hungry. With so many key characters intertwined in her fate, the author does a superb job of keeping the narrative accessible and untangled. Helpfully, there are also family trees for the houses of Tudor, Grey and Suffolk, a timeline and a selection of colour photos to refer to.

Crown Of Blood is not only the story of Jane Grey, but also those who she met along the way, from childhood to the scaffold. An informative and fascinating read, it speaks to a new generation of history enthusiasts that have been seduced by the scandals and intrigue of the Tudor dynasty.

STRANGE VICTORIANA
Tales of the curious, the weird and the uncanny from our Victorian ancestors
Author Jan Bondeson Publisher Amberley Publishing Price £20 Released Out now

You can depend on the 19th century for a dip into the sensational, mysterious and macabre, and Strange Victoriana does not disappoint. Full of detailed and gruesome illustrations and stories from the Illustrated Police News (known as the worst newspaper in England at the time it was published), this book is an anthology of true-crime stories from the reign of Queen Victoria.

Having sourced a private collection of the Illustrated Police News, author Jan Bondeson began collating the fascinating accounts for a magazine feature in 2011, and such is the public’s morbid curiosity - which doesn’t seem to alter through the ages - that this was soon turned into a serial feature. This new release is a collection of the strangest and best that the Illustrated Police News has to offer.

From medical disasters and women being buried alive to curious serial murders and dogs bearing witness in court, Bondeson brings together an eclectic mix of the most off-the-wall stories from an era that was characterised by strong moral principles and a strict social code of conduct. The tales contained within are intricately researched, presented through both the sensational headlines and original tabloid-esque drawings from the Illustrated Police News, and backed up (or indeed sometimes dispelled) with hard facts tracked down from many archives, databases, catalogues and libraries. The result is an intriguing image to peruse with often an even more fascinating story to read.

It’s easy to see how the alluring headlines sold papers on the cobbles of Victorian London. Medical freaks, unexplained deaths, sleepwalking and scantily clad women, hauntings in graveyards, suicides, animal encounters, surgeries, autopsies and not to mention members of high society involved in scandal are the kind of juicy stories that entertain and delight loyal readers, both old and new.
Nestled to be a case study for the cultural historians of tomorrow, ITV’s *Tutankhamun* – following the hunt for the remains of the boy king against the backdrop of the Great War and greater instability - is a classic example of post-*Downon Abbey* storytelling. Like *Downton*, the show barrels through history to leave tumultuous events a sidetone and their wider implications in the wind. Despite taking place across nearly two decades (in which the passage of time is mainly marked by a character transitioning from daughter to love interest), World War I and the rise of Arab nationalism serve primarily as off-screen inconveniences to Howard Carter (Max Irons) and Lord Carnarvon (Sam Neill) in their search for the tomb.

When they do push towards the foreground, events take on an altogether more distasteful tone. Egyptian authorities who believe that their nation’s antiquities should remain in the country, rather than be divvied up among the Anglo-American tomb raiders are depicted as petty-minded villains, while Howard Carter’s supposed empathy for the Arabs transforms him into an embodiment of the white saviour trope.

Carter is depicted as a rebel and outsider whose unconventional methods pit him against the status quo, but only so much as *Downton Abbey’s* cousin Matthew is a rebel for merely being a member of the privileged upper middle class as opposed to the privileged aristocracy.

Those hoping that at its worst *Tutankhamun* would be a relatively simple retelling of real events with the gloss of period drama populism to spice things up will be very disappointed. For ITV, it seems, the discovery of Tutankhamun is simply another tomb to be robbed of its glittering geegaws while the real story is crushed underfoot like so much pottery.

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**HISTORY of WAR RECOMMENDS...**

**A Guest At The Shooters’ Banquet**

*Author* Rita Gabis  *Publisher* Bloomsbury

Having discovered her grandfather may have been involved in wartime atrocities in Lithuania during World War II, Gabis embarked on a four-year journey in search of the truth. In this autobiographical account of those years, she learns that he was directly involved in a gruesome massacre in the autumn of 1941, when 8,000 Jews were shot over the course of three days in the nearby killing field of Poligon. In publishing this intimate journey into the horrific world of the Holocaust in Lithuania, she helps us to better understand certain human microdynamics of the genocide that are all too often lost in debates about the Holocaust.

**1847: A CHRONICLE OF GENIUS, GENEROSITY & SAVAGERY**

The story of a year begs the question, why?

*Author* Turtle Bunbury  *Publisher* Gill Books  

Surely such a name as Turtle Bunbury tells of parental genius. The question arises though: can the writer live up to his name? Almost. The title tells the tale. It’s the story of a year, a year rendered significant for the author as the time when the building of his family home – a great pile of a place in County Carlow, Ireland – was begun.

It’s not perhaps the most obvious time to start such a project, as Ireland was in the midst of the Great Famine that saw 1 million people die and 1 million more emigrate. But, as Bunbury shows, such a year will reverberate through the world, setting off ripples in all sorts of unexpected places. He follows the year through, telling its history through the lives of people affected by the events that unfold. Some are Irish, part of the diaspora already gone from the island but, hearing the news responding to it. Others merely share the calendar.

This is both the book’s strength and weakness. It’s a chronicle, connected only by time and, when finishing it, one is struck by the same thought that arises upon watching Stephen Fry on *QI*. Indeed, it’s all very witty and sharp, but what exactly is the point? If wit and sharpness are reason enough, then buy this book: it will delight. If, on the other hand, you require some uniting, narrative thread for your explorations in the 19th century, read the Flashman books instead.
THE WITCHES: SALEM, 1692
Looking beyond the hysteria of Salem’s darkest hours

Author Stacy Schiff Publisher Weidenfeld & Nicolson
Price £9.99 Released Out now

Receiving a timely reprint alongside Sony Pictures’ optioning of the film rights, Stacy Schiff’s *The Witches* recounts the infamous events of the 1692 Salem witch trials, from the first anguished cries of the afflicted to the final gasps of the condemned just nine months later. Schiff’s skilfully woven narrative, though framed as a straight factual account, reads as a tense historical courtroom drama, painting a fascinating but grim picture of Puritan life and the devastation caused when fear, ignorance and superstition lead a community to turn on itself.

Where others have sought to identify the cause of the madness that gripped Massachusetts, Schiff’s approach is less focused on the root of the evil and more on exploring the environment that allowed the flames of suspicion to spread as quickly, and as ferociously, as they did. Drawing primarily from ministers’ journals and notes taken during court sessions, Schiff lays out the timeline of growing communal hysteria and paranoia, while also highlighting the philosophical, cultural and social factors that defined the Puritan way of life and, with hindsight, clearly provided fuel for the developing fire.

Factual studies of the Salem trials invariably struggle to offer definitive answers, based as they are on sources that we know to be, at best, interpretive of the events around them, and at worst, wilfully negligent in accurately recording the testimony of those involved where it doesn’t suit the author’s personal views. *The Witches* acknowledges this challenge from the start. Instead what Schiff delivers is insight, her considered analysis of the source material and environment leaving little room for doubt over how events were able to escalate as they did, and her well-structured narrative defining a truly dark, though mercifully brief, period in history that continues to fascinate as much as it horrifies.

PETER & DAN SNOW’S TREASURES OF BRITISH HISTORY
2,000 years of history told through 50 key documents

Authors Peter & Dan Snow Publisher Andre Deutsch Price £30 Released Out now

“W
We are blessed in Britain to have such a rich and ancient collection of treasures... Collectively they tell us who we are. Where we are. How we got here.” Peter And Dan Snow’s *Treasures Of British History* is a collection of 50 such treasures - of the written variety - that encapsulated, or steered, key moments in the development of Great Britain from its days as an inclement group of islands under Roman occupation to its modern status as a major power on the world stage.

As might be expected, it’s very much a personal collection. As a reader, you might not agree with the inclusion of everything in this top 50, but it’s hard to deny the individual significance of any one piece, and the authors put forward strong cases for each without letting themselves become overly sentimental.

The documents are certainly eclectic, including a Roman party invitation, Jack the Ripper’s ‘Dear Boss’ letter and a ballot paper from the 2014 Scottish Referendum, but each item is presented as part of the historical, political or social era that produced it and even the most seemingly oddball choice carries a compelling back-story that, for the authors, justifies its place on the list.

*Treasures Of British History* is the perfect coffee table book for any history buff, easily accessible and hitting the right balance between brevity and depth of detail with articles that are insightful and delivered by authors that hold a clear passion for the documents and their place in British history.
How long was the Hundred Years' War?

Beverly Parker

It is normally counted from 1337 - when Philip VI of France confiscated the duchy of Aquitaine from Edward III - to the Battle of Castillon in 1453, for a total of 116 years. However, the first major battle of the war didn't take place until three years after the ‘war’ began, in 1340, and France and England remained officially at war for 20 years after the last battle. In fact, fighting almost broke out again in 1474 when the Duke of Burgundy tried to enlist the help of the English to fight against Louis XI of France.

The term ‘Hundred Years’ War’ is just a convenient label used by modern historians to group a long-running series of battles between England and France. The whole war spanned five generations of kings and included two periods in the middle in which there wasn’t any fighting for years. Calling it a single war is like referring to 1914-45 as the ‘Thirty Years’ War.

What is seppuku?

Jesse Reed

Meaning “cutting the belly”, seppuku was a form of ritual suicide used by Japanese samurai and daimyo. It was used as a way of avoiding capture or torture, or to avoid disgrace after a defeat. As the spirit was thought to reside in the stomach, the samurai believed this act would release their spirit into the afterlife.

Seppuku began in the 12th century and initially it was a solo act. The samurai would plunge a knife or short sword into his belly, make a deep horizontal slice and then stab himself in the throat. By the 17th century, it had become more ritualised and a trusted second would be standing by to deliver the killing blow by chopping through the back of the neck with a sword. This was a skilled job because the intention was to leave the head partially attached, known as kaishaku.

In reality, this act was more often used as a form of capital punishment for samurai who had committed crimes, rather than as a method of suicide. It was abolished as a punishment in 1873.

This ritual suicide was slow and painful, but considered an honourable way to die.
What is the history of the handshake?

Joseph Cook

The earliest handshakes that we know of date to 1800 BCE. Babylonian kings would grasp the hands of a statue of the god Marduk at an annual ceremony to reconfirm their right to rule. While shaking hands is often assumed to have begun as a way to demonstrate that you weren’t holding a weapon, this gesture is probably much older than that. Even chimpanzees have been seen to hold hands, and the formal handshake probably grew out of this much more instinctive gesture.

Teresa Bell

Probably less than 300 years. You might think you would be fairly comfortable with Shakespeare’s English around 1600, but this is only because we normally hear his plays performed with modern pronunciation. In the last four centuries, accents and vowel sounds have shifted significantly. Two thirds of Shakespeare’s sonnets have rhymes in them that don’t work in modern English – ‘proved’ rhymes with ‘loved’, for example, and ‘hour’ and ‘whore’ were pronounced the same. Without the familiar characters and storylines to guide us, it would be very difficult to follow the speech of a Tudor Londoner.
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Ancient cosmetics
Cleopatra's death has been romanticised for centuries, with an asp bite thought to have finished the queen off. Experts say that this method would have been slow and painful, so it's more probable the queen would have taken her life with poison.

The Egyptian and Roman sets combine architecture from many different periods, making for a display of an odd jumble of styles. Also the Arch of Constantine that can be seen wasn't built until 300 years after Cleopatra's death and doesn't stand in the forum.

While Caesarion was Caesar's son, we don't have any proof that Caesar ever considered him a legitimate heir. Caesar adopted Octavian as his rightful heir, which was considered proper and was a common occurrence in Roman culture at the time.

While Cleopatra is only shown as having one child in the film, she in fact went on to have three more with Mark Antony. The twins Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene II were born in 40 BCE with Ptolemy Philadelphus following in 36 BCE.

Excluding the myriad of small errors, Cleopatra does a fine job of capturing the dramatic story and cutthroat politics of the queen's reign. Her relationships with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony are brought to life through Elizabeth Taylor's acting, with Cleopatra's strong will and character shining through.

Director: Joseph L Mankiewicz
Starring: Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Rex Harrison
Country: US
Released: 1963

This swords and sandals epic will dazzle you with its lavish grandeur.

VERDICT: While tedious plot dialogue might stop this splendid film from being historically on point.
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