



A personal selection of local, British Isles and world history.
EDITOR: Mark Brandon WEBPAGE: jot-and-tittle.com
EMAIL: jandthistory@outlook.com



HENRY VIII¹

As a young man, Henry could speak French, Italian and Spanish and was proficient in Latin. He studied theology and played the lute, organ and virginals. He also had a reputation as a dancer. He excelled in all athletic sports, *drew the best long-bow of his age*, was accomplished at tennis, a great rider to hounds and was unbeatable at jousting. So how did this *Renaissance Prince* become the monster of his later years?



On January 24th 1536 whilst jousting, he fell from his horse and was trapped beneath it. He remained unconscious for two hours and sustained injuries that plagued him for the rest of his life. In 1524 he failed to lower his visor and suffered a blow to the head above his right eye. *Henry's explosive fits of rage, migraines, depression, insomnia, memory loss and possibly impotence may be explained by the lingering impact of brain injuries.* Other researchers believe that it was due to diabetes, hypothyroidism or psychosis and historian Tracy Borman puts it down to his ulcerated leg. However, all these ailments resulted from jousting accidents.

Incidentally, ground-penetrating radar has been used to find the actual tiltyard were Henry had his accidents. It measures some 650 by 250 feet and stood in the grounds of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, originally Greenwich Palace and Henry's favourite home.

TRIVIA²

During the time after Pope Clement V moved his seat to Avignon (1308), the *Guelphs* of Florence (see J&T No.53) incited the Papal States to rebel. The current Pope, Urban VI, asked his legate there, Cardinal Robert of Geneva, to bring them to heel. He hired

mercenaries under the condottiere Sir John Hawkwood³ and asked them to make an example of the town of Cesna, between Ravenna and Rimini. The Cardinal promised the inhabitants clemency but when they surrendered, gave his troops free licence. For three nights and days rape, pillage and murder ensued. Almost 5,000 were slain and the town put to the torch.

What you may ask was Robert's punishment - he became the first Anti-Pope, causing a schism that lasted 71 years.

Robert Peel was born in 1788, the son of a wealthy Lancashire printer who employed 15,000 people. Educated at Harrow and Oxford, Peel was a brilliant scholar before entering Parliament and being chosen as Home Secretary at the age of 34. He became Prime Minister in 1834 and formed the Conservative party - a more liberal version of the old Tory Party. He became Prime Minister again at the age of 53 when he repealed the Corn Laws, abolished hanging for most crimes, legalised trade unions and reformed the central bank and the economy. He was of course famous for starting the Metropolitan Police Force resulting in policeman being known as *bobbies*. A blot on his escutcheon was reintroducing income tax that has been with us ever since. Not always popular, Disraeli described his bright smile as *like the fittings on a coffin*. He died in 1850 after being thrown from his horse. Where are his like today I ask myself?



Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) was as popular in his own time as today. He was though sometimes rather cloyingly sentimental. Oscar Wilde remarked *One would have to have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell (The Old Curiosity Shop) without laughing.*

In February 1945, 773 Avro Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force dropped 2,500 tons of high explosives and incendiaries on the undefended European cultural icon of Dresden. The population was swollen by refugees fleeing the Russians to around 1 million souls. The bombing created a self-sustaining firestorm with temperatures over 1,500°centigrade and strong winds containing powdered glass⁴. A modern estimate is that 135,000 people died compared



with 70,000 at Hiroshima. Many on both sides of the Channel never forgave Air Marshall Arthur Harris for this act of apocalyptic vandalism *simply for the sake of increasing the terror* - despite our evidence of the Blitz actually having the opposite effect.

'Bomber' Harris retired to South Africa to avoid the criticism.

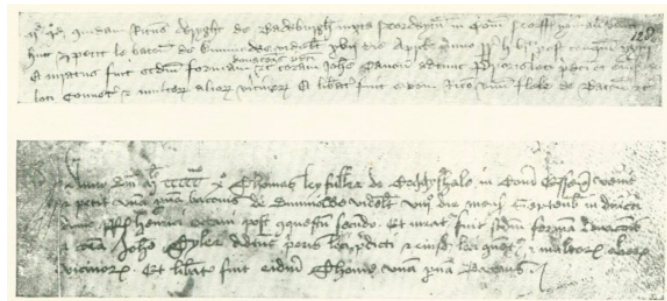
BRINGING HOME THE BACON

The Dunmow Flitch Trial exists to award a flitch (side) of bacon to married couples from anywhere in the world, if they can satisfy the Judge and Jury of 6 maidens and 6 bachelors that in 'twelvemonth and a day', they have 'not wisht themselves unmarried again'.

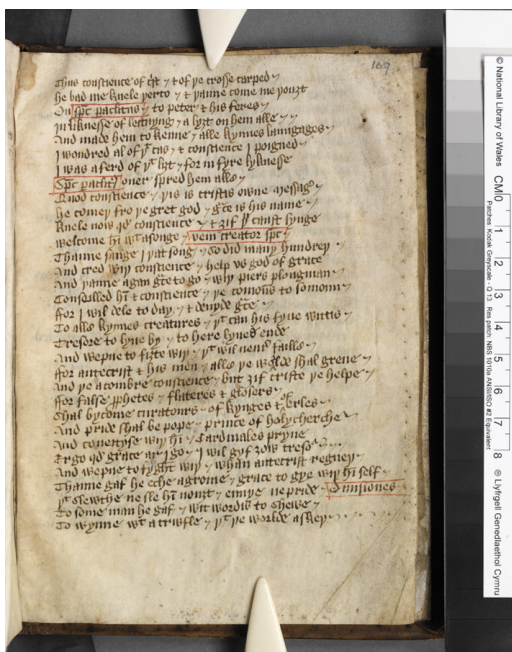
A reference to The Dunmow Flitch can even be found in The Wife of Bath's Tale within Chaucer's 14th century Canterbury Tales. The piece, bottom right, comes from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* c .1377⁵.

The Flitch Trials are held every four years in Great Dunmow, Essex, England. The tradition of these Trials is commonly dated back to 1104 when a local Lord and Lady supposedly visited the Augustinian Priory of Little Dunmow disguised as paupers. They asked the prior if he would bless their marriage which had taken place a year and a day previously. Impressed by their apparent devotion to each other, the prior responded by presenting them with a flitch of bacon (which the Priory cook happened to have been carrying past at the time). At this point the Lord, Reginald Fitzwalter, threw off his peasant garb and thanked the prior for his willingness to believe in their love. He then gifted some of his land to the Priory on the condition that a flitch of bacon would be given to any couple that could come to the Priory and prove their continued devotion to each other a year and a day after their marriage.

'We do swear by custom of confession
That we ne'er made nuptial transgression;
Nor since we were married man and wife,
By household brawls or contentious strife,
Or otherwise at bed or at board,
Offended each other in deed or word;
Or since the parish clerk said "Amen,"
Wished ourselves unmarried again;
Or in a twelvemonth and a day,
Repented not in thought or in any way,
But continued true and in desire
As when we joined hands in the holy quire.



However, the first official record does not appear until 1445 when Mr and Mrs Richard Wright were awarded their flitch of bacon (see above).



Many a couple since the Pestilence
Have plighted them together;
The fruit that they bring forth Is foul words
In jealousy without happiness,
And quarrelling in bed;
They have no children but strife,
And slapping between them,
And though they go to Dunmow
(Unless the Devil help!)
To follow after the Flitch
They never after obtain it;
And unless they both are perjured,
They lose the bacon.

I am indebted to Dunmow u3a for the idea of looking into *the Flitch*.

LYNN

In J&T numbers 74 and 77 we delved into the great trading empire of the *Hanseatic League*. King's Lynn u3a Local History Group pointed out that their town proudly possesses the last Hanseatic warehouse in the UK (below). The Hanse enclave was known as the *Steelyard*, a corruption of the medieval German *Stalhof*. In London the Steelyard was very large indeed, showing the importance of the League's trading activities.



My u3a correspondent, who is also a town guide, pointed me in the direction of the King's Lynn Town Guides' website: *King's Lynn's unique 12th century development and prosperous Hanseatic trading links created one of the wealthiest towns in medieval England. Today, its architectural legacy includes two medieval market places (one of which is the largest in England), two medieval guildhalls (one of which is the largest in England) and 2 medieval churches (one of which is the largest chapel-of-ease in England).* Then of course it is also the birthplace of George Vancouver, but I will leave that story until another time.

Incidentally, the town was known as Bishop's Lynn after the Bishop of Norwich until 1537 when in Henry VIII's time it was no longer politically correct. I don't expect the locals noticed as they always call the town *Lynn*.

For those who have not studied ecclesiology, a *chapel of ease*, is a subsidiary branch of a parish church for the attendance of those who cannot reach the main building, usually through the distance involved. This was often caused by the changing demographic such as that resulting from the Industrial Revolution. Also, for those not up on such things, the u3a is what used to be known as *The University of the Third Age*.

I wasn't going to mention the election, but Houghton Hall near King's Lynn was built for Nelson's great, great uncle, Sir Robert Walpole (right?), the MP for Kings Lynn who became the Whig First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. This made him the *de facto* first (and also longest serving) Prime Minister, who later as 1st Earl Orford, bequeathed No.10 Downing Street to the nation.



THE HOLY GRAIL⁶

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, everyone from Spanish revolutionaries and Nazis to MI6 agents wanted to steal the Holy Grail. But they were all eluded by a Valencian postwoman. Sabina Suey (below) was a worshipper at the Valencia Cathedral which housed the *Santo Cáliz*: the cup most often cited as the true Grail by Western Christianity. The city suffered badly from a heavy-handed Republican military presence, with priests, nuns and bishops murdered and churches looted. Fearing the Cathedral was next, Suey took the cup from its shrine, wrapped it in cotton wool and newspaper and placed it in a box, which she secretly stowed in the springs of her sofa. When militia members burst into the cathedral hours later and made a beeline for the cup, it was nowhere to be found.

Republican fighters searched Suey's house three times, never discovering the chalice. But soon, whispers of her involvement reached the ears of British and German spies. She was approached by MI6 agents who offered her family safe passage to England in return for the Grail. She denied any knowledge of it. Another agent made an approach on behalf of Heinrich Himmler, who was obsessed with the occult powers of the Grail and believed it would be the "ultimate prize" for Hitler. Again, Suey refused, and "somehow lived to tell the tale". When Valencia was liberated in 1939, she handed it to the Recovery Board of the National Artistic Treasure. Her family still has the sofa.

Ed: The cup is made of dark red agate on an inverted cup base of chalcedony which has Arabic writing on it. The base, stem and handles are later additions but the cup has been dated to between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. The legend goes that St Peter brought the chalice to Rome but in 258AD Roman persecution led Pope Sixtus II to split up the Vatican treasures, giving this cup into the keeping of one of his deacons, St. Lawrence. He in turn gave it to a Spanish soldier to take to Spain, Lawrence's home country⁸.



1. *Who's Who in History Vol II Tudor England* by CRN Routh (Basil Blackwell 1964) and Nora McGreevy in the *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2020.
2. Pillaged from the *February* section of *365, Great Stories from History*, Marsh & Carrick (Icon Books 2005).
3. *Sir John de Hawkwood aka Giovanni Acuto* (1320 - 1394), 17th century engraving courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
4. Photo of Dresden firestorm aftermath courtesy of New York Times.
5. Original copy of *Piers Plowman* courtesy of the National Library of Wales.
6. This article is by Adam Hay-Nicholls in *Airmail* and was reproduced in *The Knowledge*.
7. Studio of Jean-Baptiste van Loo, 1740, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery and in the Public Domain.
8. Taken from Wikipedia - Holy Chalice.