



The Octogenarian ski-jumper: free sample
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<http://octogenarianski-jumper.blogspot.com>

Special thanks are due to Robert Eyles, for tacking the impossible by taking the content of this book and turning it into a visual form.

Chapter 1

Introduction

What you are currently reading is a free sample of a book entitled 'The Octogenarian Ski-jumper'. The book lists the ages of the famous and not-so-famous at which they achieved fame, had their greatest success, or invented that gadget we all use every day. You can copy this file and print it; and email it to your friends.

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This free sample has eleven chapters: the full printed book has chapters for all ages, from the newly born to centenarians.

The full printed book can be purchased through the publisher: go to www.lulu.com and search for 'The Octogenarian Ski-jumper'.

It should also be available from December 2009 from online retailers such as www.amazon.com, www.amazon.co.uk, www.waterstones.com, www.whsmith.co.uk, and www.amazon.ca. I am working on making the book available through other retailers.

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Chapter 2

Age twenty-four

The music of the spheres

In 1863, Georges Bizet's opera 'The Pearl Fishers' was first performed in Paris. The opera is best known for the duet 'Au Fond du Temple Saint', one of the most recognisable duets in classical music, and which has been recorded by performers as diverse as Luciano Pavarotti and David Byrne. In 1940, Frank Sinatra made his singing debut with Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. In 1966, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel had their first number one hit, 'The Sound of Silence'. The year before witnessed the release of another first number one hit – 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling' by Bobby Hatfield and Bill Medley – better known as the Righteous Brothers. It also saw the release of Bob Dylan's 'Like a Rolling Stone'. Rolling Stone Mick Jagger released 'Jumping Jack Flash' in 1968.

That same year, regular radio flashes were detected from space. The signal was so regular that for a time, discoverer Jocelyn Bell humorously named the source LGM-1 – the 'LGM' representing the theory that this was a signal from little green men. However, it was soon determined that this was the first of a new class of objects called pulsars, now known to be rotating neutron stars. Bell continued in the tradition of German astronomer Heinrich d'Arrest, who in 1846 discovered (with Johann Galle) the planet Neptune, and American astronomer Clyde Tombaugh, who in 1930 discovered what was then classified as the ninth planet, Pluto.

Heat

In the first half of the nineteenth century, scientists were unsure of the nature of heat. Some argued that it was a material substance, which flowed like a liquid between bodies at different temperatures, while others claimed that it was simply the movement of atoms. In 1843, James Joule proved that the second theory was correct, and therefore that heat was simply a form of mechanical energy. Only five years later, William Thomson, better known by his later title of Lord Kelvin, established the absolute scale of temperature which bears his name - just as Joule is

commemorated by having the unit of energy named after him. Joule, interested in heat and motion as he was, might have been interested to know that the story of Harold Abrahams, who won Olympic gold in the 100 metres at the 1924 Games in Paris, was made into a film entitled 'Chariots of Fire'.

Entertainment

Elsewhere in the world of film, in 1914 one of cinema's first and most recognisable characters, 'The Tramp', as portrayed by Charlie Chaplin, first appeared in the short film 'Kid Auto Races at Venice'. In 1835, before the age of film, showman and businessman Phineas T. Barnum started his first circus tour of the US. Another man who launched his career as an entertainer was Charles Dickens, who in 1836 published the first instalment of 'Pickwick Papers'. The year after that, the lives of secretaries and stenographers was changed when Isaac Pitman launched his shorthand system.

Sport

Jim Thorpe is regarded by many sports historians as the greatest sportsman of all time. He played American football, baseball and basketball professionally, and in 1912, he won both the pentathlon and decathlon gold medals at the Stockholm Olympics. Unfortunately for Thorpe, it emerged that he had received payments for his other sporting activities prior to the Olympics, and so in 1913 he was stripped of his Olympic titles. Thorpe was reinstated as an Olympic champion in 1982, nearly thirty years after his death.

Elsewhere in sport, in 1923, tennis star Suzanne Lenglen, nicknamed 'The Goddess of Tennis', won her fifth Wimbledon title, a feat which might have earned her a place on the cover of *Time* magazine, founded three months earlier by Henry Luce. In 1980 it was the turn of Björn Borg to win his fifth Wimbledon title, while in 1962, another tennis star, Australian Rod Laver, entered the record books by becoming the third person in history to win tennis' Grand Slam - all four major tennis championships in one year. Later that decade, Geoff Hurst became the first (and so far, the only) man to score three goals in a football World Cup final in London in 1966, while in 1968 the Olympic skiing titles for downhill, slalom, and giant slalom, were all won by Jean-Claude Killy.

Moving back to the nineteen-twenties, in 1926 Bobby Jones won both the British and US Open golf championships, while the following year, Abraham Saperstein made his contribution to basketball by founding the Harlem Globetrotters.

Global communications were made easier in 1899 when the first international radio transmission took place, when Guglielmo Marconi sent a press communication by Morse code between England and France. The subject of the press communication was Marconi's achievement in making the world's first international radio transmission, proving for the first time Marshall McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message". Later that year, Jim Jeffries won the world heavyweight boxing title, as did Jack Dempsey in 1919.

The 1880s

A different angle on sport was introduced by the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1888, when it published the classic baseball poem 'Casey at the Bat' by Ernest L. Thayer. The following year British publication *The Pictorial World* asked artist Frederick Jane to produce sketches for its forthcoming article on naval manoeuvres – an act which led Jane eventually to produce 'Jane's All the World's Fighting Ships' and related publications.

Politics

In 1625, the last absolute monarch in Britain, Charles I, ascended the throne. After civil war and political reforms left Charles without his head, the stage was set for a more democratic system of government, eventually resulting in the emergence of the title of prime minister – the youngest holder of that office being the man known as William Pitt the Younger, who took office in 1783.

Classification

In public libraries there are numbers fixed to the spines of non-fiction books. Major classifications have three digits, with subdivisions requiring a decimal point. This classification of information, known as the Dewey Decimal Classification System, was developed in 1876 by Melvil Dewey. His system, which has undergone twenty-two revisions since he first introduced it, contains the number 338.476636, which is the classification for books about soft drinks, including root beer – an ironically-named temperance drink invented by Philadelphia pharmacist Charles Elmer Hires in the same year.

Chapter 3

Age twenty-nine

Writing

In 1594, William Shakespeare's play 'Titus Andronicus' premiered. The play's plot, including scenes of human sacrifice and cannibalism, are interpreted by some as the act of a young author wanting to make an impact. Whether that is true or not, authors have continued to make an impression, whether producing a sequel, as Rudyard Kipling did in 1895 with 'The Second Jungle Book', or producing their first full-length work as George Orwell did in 'Down and Out in Paris and London' in 1933. Away from fiction, journalist Bob Woodward managed to make an impression with his exposé (written with Carl Bernstein) of the Watergate scandal in 1972.

Stage and Screen

Lionel Bart's musical 'Oliver!' (based on Charles Dickens' novel 'Oliver Twist'), was first produced at the New Theatre in London in 1960. On the screen, the age of twenty-nine has proved a very successful age for actresses – in 1941, Ginger Rogers won a Best Actress Oscar for her performance in 'Kitty Foyle', and Ingrid Bergman won in 1945 for 'Gaslight'. In the sixties, Elizabeth Taylor won the Best Actress Oscar for 'Butterfield 8' in 1961, and in 1965, Julie Andrews won for 'Mary Poppins'. The most famous song in the film, bearing a title which is a non-sense word 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious', was the subject of an unsuccessful lawsuit by two songwriters who claimed it was a copyright infringement of their 1951 song entitled 'Supercalafajalistickeapealadojus'. In one of the most sensible legal pronouncements of all time, the judge declared that all references to all variations should be referred to as "that word". Earlier, in 1951, Harry Secombe appeared in BBC radio's first broadcast of 'The Goon Show', the anarchic comedy series which inspired the creators of 'Monty Python's Flying Circus'.

Stargazing

1965 also saw Robert Wilson (with Arno Penzias) detect microwave radiation from all parts of the sky. This radiation indicates a temperature of $-270\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, showing that the universe has cooled significantly since the 'Big Bang' almost fourteen billion years ago.

Wilson was following in the footsteps of Maria Mitchell, who became only the second woman in history to discover a comet in 1847, and Alvan Graham Clark, who in 1862 discovered (with his father, Alvan Clark) a dwarf companion of the star Sirius, the first known example of a type of star called a 'white dwarf'.

Mitchell and Clark both had the advantage of telescopes, whose development was assisted by Isaac Newton, who in 1672 presented his first paper on optics to the Royal Society in London. This advantage was not available to William Crabtree, who in 1639 was one of only two people in the world to witness the transit (passing across the sun's face) of the planet Venus. He had arranged to meet the other, Jeremiah Horrocks, but Horrocks died the day before the scheduled meeting.

Sport

Golfer Harry Vardon won the British Open in 1899 and the US Open in 1900. Gene Tunney retained the world heavyweight boxing title in 1927, defeating Jack Dempsey in the infamous 'Long Count' bout. Dempsey didn't retreat to a neutral corner when he floored Tunney, and the referee didn't start the count until Dempsey had. Tunney made use of all the extra time to regain his feet. This might have merited investigation by the 'Bureau of Investigation', as the FBI was known when J. Edgar Hoover became its head in 1924. Other boxers have won the same title less controversially – Rocky Marciano in 1952 and Michael Spinks in 1985.

Three-time winners

Emil Zatopek collected three Olympic gold medals in one week in 1952, for the 5000m, 10000m and the marathon. Marvin Hamlisch won three Oscars in an evening in 1974, collecting score Oscars for both 'The Sting' and 'The Way We Were', and a Best Song Oscar for the latter film. American cyclist Greg Lemond won his third Tour de France in 1990.

Social Change

A little after Zatopek, in 1957, tennis star Althea Gibson became the first African-American woman to win a Wimbledon title. Her achievement was remotely precipitated by John Brown, whose raid on Harper's Ferry in 1829 led indirectly to the American Civil War. Brown's name is celebrated in the song 'John Brown's Body (lies a-mouldering in the

grave)', the tune of which was later used for an even more famous abolitionist song, 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic'.

Chemical Elements

In 1808, four chemical elements were discovered. In England, Humphrey Davy passed an electrical current through molten minerals and was able to isolate the elements calcium, magnesium and barium. The first of these is a key constituent of bones and teeth. Most people usually encounter magnesium in a self-medicating capacity – either taken as a cure for indigestion as milk of magnesia, or as a laxative in Epsom salts. Finally, barium is most likely to be experienced if a doctor wishes to take an x-ray of one's alimentary canal – from either end.

In France, Joseph-Louis Gay-Lussac (working with Louis Thenard) discovered the element boron – used in detergents and in the manufacture of heat resistant glass.

Two Bells

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell constructed the first telephone. However, his greatest invention was the second telephone, which he used in conjunction with the first to hold the first telephone conversation, saying to his assistant in the next room "Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you".

Chapter 4

Age thirty-two

Exploration

In 1759, France and Britain were engaged in the French and Indian War. The prize in this conflict was control of Canada. In that year, General James Wolfe won the battle of Quebec, and ensured British control. In 1806, Meriwether Lewis (one half of the celebrated Lewis and Clark expedition) returned to St. Louis having spent the bulk of the last three years mapping the Missouri River. In 1947, Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl wanted to prove that South Americans could have settled in the islands of the Pacific, long before the days of the Europeans in that part of the world. To that end, he built a balsa wood raft which he named *Kon-Tiki*, and ended his 101-day journey across the South Pacific on Raroia reef in the Tuamotu Archipelago.

In the air in 1903, Orville Wright achieved the first sustained motorised aircraft flight. In 1910, Charles Rolls, co-founder of Rolls-Royce Ltd, made the first roundtrip flight across the English Channel, and in 1919, Arthur Whitten Brown successfully completed the first ever transatlantic flight (with John Alcock). In 1936, aviatrix Amy Johnson, subject of the song 'Amy, Wonderful Amy' took only four days to regain the record for a flight from South Africa to England, and in 1983 aboard the seventh space shuttle mission, Sally Ride became the first American woman in space.

Sport

Three golfers share the distinction of winning two major championships in a year – Arnold Palmer in 1962, Jack Nicklaus in 1972, and Tom Watson in 1982. 1972 also saw Kenyan Kip Keino win the 3000m steeplechase gold and 1500m silver Olympic medals, to add to the two medals he won four years previously.

In 1964, Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia, having run 52 miles and 770 yards, retained the Olympic marathon title – the first person in history to do so. During his second win Bikila wore shoes, unlike his first victory.

American Al Oerter only had to throw a discus 240.85 metres (56.35 metres, 59.18 metres, 60.54 metres, and 64.78 metres) in total in four throws, culminating in his fourth consecutive Olympic gold in 1968. However, he had to visit Melbourne, Rome, Tokyo and Mexico City in order to do it. Although Africa is not represented in Oerter's world tour, in 1974 Muhammad Ali defeated George Foreman for boxing's world heavyweight championship in the 'Rumble in the Jungle' in Kinshasa.

Travel

Modern interests in travelling inspired Thomas Cook to found his travel agency in 1841. The first trip he arranged was for a party of temperance campaigners from the city of Leicester to attend a meeting in the nearby town of Loughborough. Another modern interest – the detective story – can be traced back to the same year, when Edgar Allen Poe published 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. Returning to travelling, Henry Ford – who realised the desire of all to have control over their own journeys – demonstrated his first car in Detroit in 1896. Before the widespread use of motorised transport, people had to rely on shoes – in 1885, Surinam-born Jan Matzeliger patented the shoe-lacing machine and started the first mass production of shoes. Hollywood has also demonstrated an interest in travel – James Stewart won Best Actor for 'The Philadelphia Story' in 1941, James van Heusen won for writing the song 'Swinging on a Star' from the film 'Going My Way' in 1945, William Friedkin won Best Director for 'The French Connection' in 1972, Geena Davis won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role in 'The Accidental Tourist' in 1989, and Nicholas Cage won Best Actor for 'Leaving Las Vegas' in 1996. Before there were moving pictures, Edvard Grieg's music for the play 'Peer Gynt' was performed at its opening in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1876, and Claude Debussy's 'L'Après-midi d'une faune' premiered at the Société Nationale in Paris in 1894.

Travel and Writing

Writers have exploited the taste for travel – Herman Melville published 'Moby Dick', his candidate for the greatest American novel in 1851, and Robert Louis Stevenson published 'Treasure Island' in 1882. J.D. Salinger captured a different kind of journey in 'A Catcher in the Rye', published in 1951. All three books have been published by Penguin, whose founder Allen Lane transformed the book world by publishing paperback books priced at sixpence each in 1935. Armchair travellers may prefer to subscribe to a magazine such as the *Readers' Digest*, founded in 1922 by De Witt Wallace, or the *New Yorker*, first published in 1925 by Harold W. Ross. Or you could just have a game of Scrabble, the

precursor of which, a game called 'Lexico', was invented by Alfred Mosher Butts in 1931.

Non-verbal communication

The rules of Scrabble require use of words found in a dictionary. In 1971, show-jumper Harvey Smith made a V-sign at the judges using his middle and index fingers while in a competition at Hickstead. He claimed later that it was a Churchillian 'V for Victory'. The distinction is that the latter has the palm of the hand facing the recipient of the gesture, while the obscene former gesture has the back of the hand presented. However, it didn't stop the expression 'doing a Harvey Smith' entering the Oxford English Dictionary.

The 1930s

The year of Lexico also saw gangster and racketeer Al Capone finally sent to prison, not for any of the violent crimes with which he is normally associated, but for tax evasion. The 1930s also saw the first appearance of Walt Disney's Donald Duck in 1934, and Helen Wills-Moody's eighth Wimbledon victory in 1938. That year also witnessed Lou Costello (with partner Bud Abbott) broadcasting the 'Who's on First?' dialog, in which the explanation of a baseball game is confused by the fact that there are basemen named Who, What, and I don't know.

In the same year, Chester Carlsson made the world's first photocopy. The exact date and location is known, because the copy was of the characters '10-22-38 Astoria' – Astoria being a district of Queen's, New York.

Lightscreens

Carlsson's process requires a steady stream of bright light, and therefore owes a debt to Thomas Edison, who in 1879 first demonstrated his incandescent light bulb at his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey. A steady source of light was also necessary for the appropriately named Auguste Lumière – his surname being the French word for light. In 1895 (working with his younger brother Louis) he made the first demonstration of moving pictures using celluloid, in the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. Moving pictures have continued to delight audiences ever since; in 1963 Sean Connery made his first appearance as James Bond in 'Dr No'. In 1989, John Lasseter, later the director of 'Toy Story' won an Animation Oscar for his film 'Tin Toy', and in 1991, Nick Park, the creator of Wallace and Gromit, won for 'Creature Comforts'.

Politics

In 1399 English King Henry IV ascended the throne. Those interested in knowing more about his life and times can read about him in three

Shakespeare plays: Richard II, Henry IV part 1, and Henry IV part 2. A less celebrated king was Achmed Bey Zogu, who in 1928 became the first and only King of Albania. Since both of them came to the throne in tumultuous times, George Gallup probably could not have accurately predicted their accessions – however, he did accurately predict that Democrats would gain seats in the 1934 Congressional elections, thus becoming the founding father of the science of opinion polls – which later became known as psephology. Gallup might have had trouble predicting the change to rules required when Joseph Pease was elected to the House of Commons in 1832. Being a Quaker, he would not take an oath, and was admitted on his affirmation.

O Canada!

In 1923, Canadian Frederick Banting was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine, for his work treating diabetics with insulin. And in 1947, Canadian-born Harold Russell achieved the unique distinction of winning two Oscars for the same performance. Russell lost both hands during the war, and appeared in 'The Best Years of Our Lives' playing a double amputee. He won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for this performance, and in addition a special Oscar for "Bringing aid and comfort to disabled veterans through the medium of motion pictures".

Chapter 5

Age thirty-seven

Jersey boys

In 1852, novelist Anthony Trollope made his least-known contribution to modern society. Although the 'Penny Post' system had been in operation for twelve years, the system was constantly being enhanced. One of the major problems was queues at post offices, to which all letters had to be taken. Trollope oversaw the installation of what he called 'pillar boxes', more frequently referred to as post boxes in the UK, or mailboxes in the US. The first of these were erected in the island of Jersey. In 1951, 'Jersey' Joe Walcott became the oldest man to win the world heavy-weight boxing championship.

Sport

Tennis player Hazel Wightman won the ladies' doubles at Wimbledon (partnered by Helen Wills Moody) for the first time, in 1924. In 1978, Geoff Boycott, having played cricket for England for thirteen years, seven months and fourteen days, finally became captain of the national team against Pakistan in Karachi. The 10,000 Test run barrier was first broken by Indian batsman Sunil Gavaskar in 1987; his record stood for six years, before Australian Allan Border overtook it. 1987 also saw baseball star Mike Schmidt hit his 500th home run – Jimmie Foxx hit his 534th and final home run in 1945.

Entertainment

William Cody, better known as 'Buffalo Bill' turned the Wild West into an entertainment when he first opened his show in Omaha in 1883. In 1966, Gerry Anderson's film 'Thunderbirds are Go!' opened, as did his television series 'Captain Scarlet'. Fellow animator Nick Park won his third Oscar for the Wallace and Gromit adventure 'A Close Shave' in 1996. Actress Glenda Jackson won her second Oscar, for 'A Touch of Class' in 1974 – in 1861, her namesake Thomas Jackson gained the nickname 'Stonewall' at the first battle of Bull Run.

Technology firsts

In 1947, Edwin Land was on a sightseeing trip in New Mexico with his wife and three-year-old daughter. His daughter wanted to see the photographs they had taken that day, and Land found himself unable to explain that photographs had to be sent away and processed. This drove him to produce and manufacture his instant developing camera.

In the same year, William Shockley invented the transistor (with John Bardeen and Walter Brattain). The combination of Shockley's invention with that of Jay Forrester, who in 1956 was issued a patent for computer core memory, made the modern computer possible. Without either of these technologies, John Logie Baird still managed to give the first public demonstration of television in London in 1926.

The 1920s

The decade that started television also saw the launch of the perfume Chanel No. 5 by Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel; the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Physics to Niels Bohr, for his explanation of the structure of atoms, in 1922, and the discovery of hafnium (named after the Latin name for Copenhagen, the home of Bohr) by George de Hevesy (with Dirk Coster) in 1923. In 1929, it was the turn of Frenchman Louis de Broglie to win the Nobel Prize, for his discovery of the wavelike nature of electrons; fellow-Frenchman Paul Lecoq de Boisbaudran discovered the element gallium (named after the Latin word for France) in 1875. Or perhaps he was craftily naming it after himself – gallus being the Latin word for 'coq' in French, 'cockerel' in English.

Politics

Of the six Queens of England to reign in their own right, rather than to hold that title because their husband was the king, two ascended the throne at thirty-seven – Mary I in 1553, and Queen Anne in 1702. In 1975, Juan Carlos became King of Spain, and oversaw his country's return to democracy. Less successful in the same regard was Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was sworn-in as Haiti's first elected president after 190 years of independence in 1991.

Exploration

Explorer and missionary Father Jacques Marquette, also born in Haiti, built the first settlement in what is now the city of Chicago in 1674. Stamford Raffles' contribution to the British Empire took place in 1819, when he landed in Singapore for the first time, and in short order declared it under the control of the British East India Company. Orville Wright made the first flight of more than one hour in 1908, and Louis Blériot made his historic flight across the English Channel one year later.

The reluctant philatelist

In the same year as Blériot, Ernest Rutherford was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, for his work on atomic disintegration, and the chemistry of radioactive substances. This honour slightly took him aback, as he had long maintained that as far as science was concerned, there were two kinds – physics, which he held in high regard, and other science, which appeared to be about classification, and therefore he dismissed as ‘stamp collecting’. How Rutherford would have classified the work of William Wollaston, who published his discovery of the very rare chemical element rhodium in 1804, before there were stamps, is unknown.

Music

In 1979, Paul McCartney was awarded a rhodium disk. Rhodium was selected for this unique award since it is the rarest of the precious metals, with a value typically nine times that of gold. The award was presented to McCartney by the Guinness Book of Records in recognition of three achievements. Firstly, having had forty-three million-selling records between 1962 and 1978; secondly, having won sixty-nine gold disks; and thirdly, having sold an estimated 100 million albums and 100 million singles.

Richard Wagner’s opera ‘Lohengrin’ was first performed in Weimar in 1850, and the following year, Giuseppe Verdi’s ‘Rigoletto’ was first performed in Venice. The man who created the marching band, along with a substantial part of the marching band repertoire performed at sporting events all over the United States, John Philip Sousa, made his first public performance with his band in 1892, in the same year that Baptist minister Francis J. Bellamy drafted the pledge of allegiance to the flag, which was first used at the World’s Fair in Chicago. Returning to Italy, Giacomo Puccini’s opera ‘La Bohème’ premiered in Turin in 1896. George Gershwin’s opera ‘Porgy and Bess’ opened in Boston in 1935.

Glenn Miller made history by being the first recipient of a gold disk, for ‘Chattanooga Choo Choo’ in 1942. Perhaps record company RCA, which presented Miller with the disk, was recalling the discovery of gold in the town of Coloma by James Marshall in 1848 – an event which precipitated the California Gold Rush the following year.

Literature

Continuing with a metallic theme, Irish author and playwright Oliver Goldsmith published ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’ in 1766, and in England in 1849, Charles Dickens published his most autobiographical novel, ‘David Copperfield’.

Aldous Huxley published his dystopian vision of the future, 'Brave New World', in 1932. The geographical New World has seen Henry David Thoreau's 'Walden' published in 1854, Henry James' 'The Portrait of a Lady' published in 1880, F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'Tender is the Night' published in 1934, and Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' published in 1953.

Saving lives

Miller's crucible is not a physical one, but someone who made a contribution to the controlled use of flame was Humphrey Davy, Director of the Royal Institution of Great Britain. In 1815 he turned his attention to the problem of explosions in mines. Miners needed light to work, but use of a candle meant that pockets of methane (which was then called fire-damp) could ignite, killing the miners. Davy adapted the lamp by surrounding the flame with wire gauze. The gauze conducted the heat evenly, and thus was never hot enough to ignite any methane present. It is credited with saving thousands of lives.

Chapter 6

Age forty

Science

Anders Celsius devised the temperature scale that bears his name, and which is in use throughout the world, in 1741. Michael Faraday constructed the first dynamo – the key to electricity generation – in 1831, and William Henry Fox-Talbot invented the negative-positive photographic process, which is still with us despite the rise of digital cameras, in 1840. Albert Einstein received the first experimental proof of his general theory of relativity in 1919, when a British expedition was able to observe, during a total solar eclipse, that starlight is deflected away from the sun.

Frederick Sanger was awarded the first of his two Nobel Prizes in 1958, for work on the structure of proteins. Abraham Lincoln was granted US patent number 6469, a device for lifting riverboats over shallows, in 1849. He remains the only US president to file a patent.

Literature

Later, Lincoln said “So you’re the little lady who caused this big war” to Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose book ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ stirred up sympathy for enslaved people when it was published in 1852. Race has been an issue addressed by other writers, including William Shakespeare, who wrote ‘Othello’ in 1604, and DuBose Heyward, who in 1925 wrote ‘Porgy’ on which George Gershwin’s opera ‘Porgy and Bess’ is based. But some stopped at having a character in their books called Tom – these include Charles Dickens, who published the first instalment of ‘Bleak House’ also in 1852; and George Eliot, who published ‘The Mill on the Floss’ in 1860.

Oscar Wilde wrote ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ in 1895. There is no character in the play named Ernest, but in 1936, Wallis Simpson obtained a divorce from her husband Ernest and was therefore free, at least in the eyes of the law, to marry King Edward VIII – thus precipitating the Abdication crisis. The problem could perhaps have been circumvented if she had followed the example of poet Elizabeth Barrett, who in 1846

decided that a fresh start was required, and eloped with her long-time correspondent Robert Browning.

Oscar winners

Some people feel that looks diminish at forty, and some actors complain that work is harder to get as they pass this age. Many would argue that this didn't happen to Mel Gibson, but perhaps he was hedging his bets when he not only starred in 'Braveheart', but also produced and directed it. He picked up two Oscars – for Best Picture and Best Director in 1996. Burt Bacharach had a double-Oscar night in 1970, when he collected them for his score for 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid', and for 'Raindrops keep Fallin' on my Head' – the song which featured in the film. Other Oscar winners include Joel Grey for his performance as the Master of Ceremonies in 'Cabaret' in 1973, and Sidney Poitier, who became the first African-American man to win an Oscar for Best Actor, in 'Lilies of the Field' in 1964. Stanley Kubrick won for Best Special Effects for '2001: A Space Odyssey' in 1969.

Sport

Tennis player Charles Dixon won the men's doubles in 1913 (partnered by Roper Barrett) and Agatha Morton the ladies' doubles the following year (partnered by Elizabeth Ryan) at Wimbledon, in both cases their second titles. Golfer Jack Nicklaus won both the US PGA and the US Open in 1980, while Ben Hogan had gone one better by winning three majors – the US Masters, the US Open and the British Open all in the same year – 1953. Cricketer Jack Hobbs scored his 100th first-class century (against Somerset at Bath in 1923), while Don Bradman scored his last-ever century in his own testimonial match in Melbourne in 1948.

Exploration

Captain James Cook sailed round many different parts of the Pacific Ocean, but the purpose of his first trip was scientific: to observe the transit of the planet Venus across the sun's face in 1769. These events are rare; the next will occur in 2012, and the one after that in 2117. Another explorer, John Glenn, became the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962, and six years later, Frank Borman and James Lovell in Apollo 8 became the first men (with William Anders) to make a rocket trip around the Moon. Much earlier, in 1785, John Jeffries became (with Jean-Pierre Blanchard) the first man to cross the English Channel in a balloon. One man who made crossing the channel difficult for unwelcome visitors was Reginald Mitchell, designer of the Spitfire, which made its first flight in 1936.

Invention

Those who have made contributions to the world around us include Belgian Jean-Joseph-Etienne Lenoir, who in 1862 built the first vehicle with an internal combustion engine. This made possible not only Spitfires, smog and traffic jams, but also motor shows, at one of which (the Paris Motor Show of 1910) George Claude displayed not a car but his invention – neon lights. They would have been seen by Henry Royce, who formed his car company (with Charles Rolls) six years earlier. Meanwhile, on Christmas Eve 1906, Reginald Fessenden made the first demonstration of the transmission of the human voice via radio-telephone, reading a passage from the gospel of St. Luke and playing the violin to radio-operators along the North American Atlantic coast. He can therefore be considered the father of the mobile phone. Those who drive and use their mobile phone at the same time might find themselves needing the surgical services pioneered by Joseph Lister, who in 1867 was the first to use the improved crystalline form of carbolic acid as an antiseptic.

Children, women and song

William Horlick sold his first malted milk in 1886, and in 1894, Pierre Paul Emile Roux of Paris announced a vaccine for diphtheria, at that time a common but deadly childhood disease which killed tens of thousands annually. In 1921, Marie Stopes transformed a part of the lives of women with the opening of Britain's first birth control clinic, and in 1937, Wallace Carothers transformed women's lives in a different way with the patenting of nylon.

When Mozart's operas are referred to using the English language, their titles are translated – with one exception. That one came from the pen of Lorenzo da Ponte, who wrote the libretto for the opera 'Cosi Fan Tutte' which opened in 1790. The title actually means 'All women are like that'. Opting for less controversial titles, in 1943 'Oklahoma!' by Richard Rodgers (with Oscar Hammerstein II) opened, and in 1964, 'Fiddler on the Roof' with words by Sheldon Harnick (and music by Jerry Bock) opened.

Politics

In 1824, Simon Bolivar, who also contributed to the independence of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, became President of Peru. On a smaller scale in 1919, Nancy Astor, the American-born heiress, became the first woman to take her seat in the British House of Commons, representing the people of the Plymouth Sutton constituency. In 1934 Mao Tse-Tung started the Long March, still an iconic event in the official history of China, and in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy, perhaps

wondering how far Mao had progressed, first warned that there were 205 Communist agents in the State Department. In 1983, Polish shipyard worker and political activist Lech Wałęsa was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, for more pragmatic work against a real communist organisation.

One man who managed to find his way into the history books by riding a horse was Paul Revere, whose celebrated ride from Boston to Lexington (with the lesser-known William Dawes) was made in 1775.

Chapter 7

Age forty-four

Books and Letters

If you go by initials, you might want to consider writing a children's story. In 1900, the first of L. Frank Baum's fourteen Oz books, 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' was published, and in 1904, J.M. Barrie's play 'Peter Pan' was first performed in London. Twenty-two years later, A.A. Milne published the first Winnie-the-Pooh book. Or you could write a book for adults – in 1921 E.M. Forster published 'A Passage to India'.

Further back in history, Niccolo Machiavelli, privately circulated his work of political philosophy, 'The Prince', in 1513. Fyodor Dostoevsky published the first part of 'Crime and Punishment' in 1866. In 1973, Robert Pirsig published 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance'. All three of these authors have the dubious distinction of appearing on a website, LibraryThing.com, which listed books most commonly owned that the owners have not read. Missing from the list is Sigmund Freud's 'Interpretation of Dreams', which was published in 1900.

Science

Isaac Newton was finally persuaded (by his friend and celebrated predictor of comets, Edmund Halley) to publish his discoveries on the laws of motion, mechanics, and gravity, which he did in his master work 'Principia' in 1687. Two Swedish scientists discovered chemical elements – in 1824 Jons-Jakob Berzelius discovered silicon, the main ingredient of sand and computer chips; while a child born that year, Pierre Janssen, became in 1868 the first person (independently of J. Norman Lockyer) to identify a new element, helium, not on the Earth, but by studying the lines produced in the spectrum of the Sun. Pierre Curie received the Nobel Prize for Physics (shared with his wife Marie and Henri Becquerel) in 1903. Marie herself received the prize for Chemistry outright in 1911, and ten years later, Frederick Soddy was awarded the Physics prize for his discovery of isotopes – varieties of atoms of one chemical element in which the masses differ. The work of these scientists would have

dangerous repercussions in 1952, when Edward Teller oversaw the detonation of the world's first hydrogen bomb. Some wished to turn the clock back to 1862, when the most dangerous weapon was Richard Gatling's newly patented machine gun.

Music

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherezade' suite premiered in Leipzig in 1888, and in 1918 at the Queen's Hall in London, Gustav Holst's 'The Planets' suite was first performed. This suite remains the best-selling classical work by an English composer, and has sold on a variety of media, including CD, made possible by the efforts of Charles Townes, who (with Arthur Schawlow) was granted the first patent for a laser in 1960, enabling the subsequent development of the compact disc.

Entertainment

It is sometimes said that "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again". This may have been the motive of Margaret du Pont, who in 1962 won the mixed doubles title at Wimbledon for the first time (partnered by Neale Fraser). In other spheres of entertainment, John Constable painted one of the world's most famous landscape paintings, *The Hay Wain*, in 1821; 'Dad's Army', regarded by many as the best British comedy ever written, opened in 1968, written by Jimmy Perry (and David Croft); while on the big screen, perhaps the most celebrated Oscar winner is Hattie McDaniel, who in 1940 became the first African-American woman to win for Best Supporting Actress in 'Gone with the Wind'. In 1948, she voiced the character 'Aunt Tempy' in 'Song of the South', in which James Baskett made history as the first human to appear in a Disney film, and also won an honorary Oscar – the first African-American man to do so.

Artists aged forty-four have dominated films with a strong American geographical flavour in their titles: for example, 'In Old Chicago', for which Alice Brady won a best Supporting Actress Oscar in 1938; 'Kentucky', in which Walter Brennan won his second Oscar in 1939; 'On The Town', for which Roger Edens won his second Best Score Oscar in 1950; 'California Suite', in which Maggie Smith won her second Oscar in 1979; 'Philadelphia', for which Bruce Springsteen won a Best Song Oscar (for 'Streets of Philadelphia') in 1994; and 'LA Confidential', for which Kim Basinger won an Oscar in 1998.

Politics

In 1852, Napoleon III was proclaimed emperor of the Second French Empire. In 1966 Jean-Bedel Bokassa became president of the Central African Republic, but would later suffer such delusions of grandeur that he crowned himself emperor and renamed his country the Central

African Empire. Such megalomaniac tendencies were frequently defeated by the agents in the cult television series 'The Avengers' starring Patrick MacNee, which premiered in the US in 1966. Sandwiched between Napoleon III and Bokassa is the more sedate George V, who became king in 1910. Sirimavo Bandaranaike made history in 1960 as the first woman to become a prime minister (of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka). Twenty years later, the Reverend Canaan Banana became the first president of the newly independent Zimbabwe. In 1993, Janet Reno became the first woman to be Attorney-General of the US.

The Industrial Revolution

In 1825, George Stephenson ushered in the era of rail travel by using his engine *Locomotion* to pull his train, complete with passengers, from Stockton to Darlington, a distance of twenty-six miles. Another contribution to transport was made in 1935 by Yorkshireman Percy Shaw. He founded the Reflecting Roadstuds Company to exploit his invention that has over the years avoided thousands of accidents by making road boundaries visible – the cat's-eye.

The Information Revolution

Rail transport was one of the technologies which enabled the development of formal postal systems, which were given a further boost in January 1840 when Rowland Hill analysed the costs of running a postal service, and determined that handling, not distance travelled, was the biggest influence on cost. He therefore introduced the 'Penny Post' – you paid only a penny, regardless of the distance from sender to recipient. However, there were problems – people still had to go to post offices to post their letters, and the postman had to knock on the door and wait for an answer so that the letters could be delivered. As a result, in May that year he introduced postage stamps, including the famous 'Penny Black' and advocated rectangular holes in doors so that letters could be delivered more efficiently. No British front door is complete without its integral 'letter box'. Both rail travel and postal services have proved invaluable to businesses – a fact probably not lost on Charles Dow, who in 1896 published his stock market index for the first time, and whose name still appears in the successor company, Dow Jones.

Documentation

Another modern invention was pioneered by James Watt. He is best known today for the development of the steam engine, and his name is used as the unit for power. As a businessman and inventor who had greatly improved the design of steam engines, his business was booming, and he successfully expanded the manufacturing plant to keep up

with demand. The greatest bottleneck was the paperwork required to keep track of the work in progress, so the great man applied himself to a different challenge and successfully patented the first document copying process in 1780.

Chapter 8

Age fifty

Birth of a nation

If you're not sure what to do when you reach this age, why not form your own country? Certainly three, and probably four, men signed the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 when they were fifty – Abraham Clark of New Jersey, Lewis Morris of New York, Benjamin Harrison of Virginia, and George Wythe, also of Virginia, whose exact date of birth is not known. However, only one US president has been inaugurated at this age – Millard Fillmore in 1850.

Women created equal

The signers of the American Declaration of Independence held “all men to be created equal”. In the following two centuries others rectified some of the omissions in the implementation of the idea. In 1913, Ida Wells-Barnett demonstrated in Washington DC for female suffrage. In 1934, Arthur W. Mitchell became the first African-American Democratic congressman (for Illinois), while in 1948, Margaret Chase Smith became the first woman elected to the US Senate. This was her second achievement – eight years earlier she had been elected as a congresswoman for Maine.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Constance Markievicz became the first woman elected as a Member of Parliament in 1918. However, as a Sinn Fein member committed to an independent Ireland, she refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown, and therefore never took her seat in the House of Commons. In the middle of the Atlantic, Vigdis Finnbogadóttir became the first female president of Iceland in 1980.

Science

In 1859, twenty-eight years after setting sail around the world in the *Beagle*, Charles Darwin finally got round to publishing his theory of evolution in ‘The Origin of Species’. His book caused bigger cultural shockwaves than the physical ones present in air, which were first photographed by Ernst Mach in 1888. Mach is best known for giving his name

to the scale used to define the speeds of supersonic aircraft – the speed of sound being Mach 1. Fellow German Wilhelm Röntgen discovered x-rays in 1895, effectively launching the science of atomic physics. Antoine-Henri Becquerel received a Nobel Prize in 1903 for his pioneering work in this field, while in 1949 Isidor Rabi found a peaceful use for this technology, inventing the atomic clock and therefore enabling the subsequent development of the global positioning system, or GPS. Using GPS to know where you are is very useful when moving around, particularly at higher speeds and in new ways, as pioneered for example by Malcolm Campbell, who broke the world land speed record in his car *Bluebird* by driving at over 300mph in 1935. GPS has also proved useful to pilots of helicopters, the first practical example of which was built by Igor Sikorsky in 1939.

Social change

In 1907 Robert Baden-Powell held a camp for twenty-two boys on Brownsea Island off the south coast of England, and thereby founded the Boy Scout Movement. He advocated the outdoor life, something clearly of interest to Vivien Fuchs, who led the first expedition to cross the entire Antarctic continent in 1958. Another enthusiast for the outdoor life was William Willett, although he was much less adventurous. In the same year as Baden-Powell's activity, Willett was out for an early morning walk. He noticed that although it was broad daylight, most curtains were drawn and most people asleep, and he realised that they would be out and about in the dark of the evening. He therefore proposed the idea of Daylight Saving, and his proposal, where adopted, saves both energy and lives, at the cost of the entire population changing their clocks twice a year.

Invention

Light was also the interest of Joseph Swan, who in 1879 invented the carbon filament light bulb (independently of, and prior to, the more famous Thomas Edison). In 1913 Henry Ford introduced the moving assembly line, and his car business continued to be such a success that Walter Chrysler formed his own company in 1925, the year after Thomas Watson decided that his company, the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Corporation, didn't have a memorable name, and changed it to the catchier International Business Machines – better known as IBM.

In 1967, actor Reg Varney, best known as the star of the 1960s sitcom 'On the Buses', made history by being the first person to use an automated teller machine, at a branch of Barclays Bank in Enfield in North London.

Art and Entertainment

Eduard Manet exhibited *The Bar at the Folies Bergère*, one of the world's most recognised paintings, in 1882. In the musical world, Peter Tchaikovsky was delighted to be guest conductor at the opening of Carnegie Hall in 1891.

Playwright J.B. Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls' was written in 1944 and opened in 1945 – not in his native Britain, but at the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow, because there was no theatre available in Britain. Other 50-year-old writers include Bertolt Brecht, whose play 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' premiered in 1948; Joy Adamson, whose book 'Born Free' about Elsa the lioness was published in 1960, and Arthur C. Clarke, whose '2001: A Space Odyssey' was published in 1968.

Cinema

All of these have been transferred to film; achievers in the world of film include Oscar-winning actors David Niven in 1959 for 'Separate Tables' and Robin Williams in 1998 for 'Good Will Hunting'. Those involved with music in the movies have fared even better – songwriters Harry Warren, the appropriately suffixed Oscar Hammerstein II, and Tim Rice all picked up their second Oscars, in 1944, 1946 and 1995 respectively. But fellow songwriter Sammy Cahn tops the list here, by collecting his fourth Oscar in 1964 for the song 'Call Me Irresponsible' from the film 'Papa's Delicate Condition'. The manuscript of the lyrics to Elton John's song 'Candle in the Wind 1997', which he sang at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, were auctioned in 1998 for \$442,500.

Finally, if you are considering a sporting career, you should note that footballer Stanley Matthews played his last top-flight game for Stoke City in 1965.

Chapter 9

Age fifty-eight

Eclipse

In 1715, when observing a total solar eclipse, Edmund Halley first saw and described the phenomenon now known as 'Baily's Beads'. This occurs as the moon completely covers the sun's face, and rays of intensely bright sunlight passing through valleys on the moon are seen surrounding the black disk.

Oscars

In 1953, director John Ford picked up his fourth Oscar, for 'The Quiet Man'. Adolph Deutsch picked up his third Score Oscar for 'Oklahoma!' in 1956, and Ken Darby picked up his third Score Oscar for 'Camelot' in 1968. Between the two, Friz Freleng launched the cartoon series 'The Pink Panther' in 1964, and got an animation Oscar in 1965 for the first ever Pink Panther cartoon, entitled 'The Pink Phink'. Henry Mancini, celebrated composer of the Pink Panther theme, picked up his fourth Score Oscar for 'Victor/Victoria' in 1983.

Becoming President

James Monroe was inaugurated as president of the United States in 1817, for the first time. William McKinley was inaugurated into the same office in 1901, for the second time, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected into the same office for the third time in 1940.

The 1940s

On the opposite side of the Atlantic, Geoffrey de Havilland saw the prototype Mosquito, the fastest aircraft in the Second World War until the arrival of the first operational jets towards the end of the war, make its first flight.

The following year, in America, George Papanicolaou published his paper on early diagnosis of cervical cancer – a publication which led to the screening process known as the 'pap' smear, and which is credited with reducing cases of the disease by 70%.

Politics

Returning to a political theme, William Gladstone formed the first of his four governments in 1868, and Karol Wojtyła was elected pope in 1978 and chose the title John Paul II. In the 1980s, Agatha Barbara became the first woman to be president of Malta in 1982, and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the Berlin Wall to be breached in 1989. He later received the Nobel Peace Prize – something he had in common with Anwar Sadat, who made his historic visit to Israel in 1977, and with Kofi Annan, who became Secretary General of the United Nations in 1997.

Africa

In 1871, to herald the opening of the Suez Canal in Egypt, Giuseppe Verdi's opera 'Aida' opened at the Khedivial Opera House in Cairo. In the same year, David Livingstone, explorer of a less-documented part of Africa, was tracked down by Henry Morton Stanley at Ujiji.

Science

Humans continue to track things down – witness the awarding of Nobel Prizes in Chemistry to George de Hevesy in 1943, for his work on the use of isotopes as tracers in chemical processes, and to Richard Ernst in 1991 for his work improving nuclear magnetic resonance imaging; and the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Physics to Charles Thomson Wilson in 1927, for his invention of the cloud chamber, allowing subatomic charged particles to be detected and tracked.

Writing

If he'd been in Ujiji, he might have been rescued earlier – as it was, Daniel Defoe chose to strand his hero, Robinson Crusoe, on a desert island. The book itself was published in 1719. Edith Wharton published 'The Age of Innocence' in 1920, and William Butler Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

An economic judgement

Although Nobel Prizes are actually presented on 10 December, Alfred Nobel's birthday, they are announced at intervals through the autumn. In 1995, Robert Lucas might have been looking apprehensively at the calendar. Seven years previously, his divorce settlement stated that if he received a Nobel Prize before 31 October 1995, half the prize money would go to his ex-wife, Rita. With three weeks to go, Robert Lucas was awarded the prize, and Rita became \$500,000 richer.

Chapter 10

Age sixty-one

A Century

Joseph Haydn, having completed 100 symphonies, started work on his second hundred when his 101st symphony, nicknamed 'The Clock', premiered in London in 1794.

Political office

The previous year, George Washington was inaugurated for the second time, and also laid the cornerstone of the Capitol building. His successor as president, John Adams, was inaugurated in 1797. Moses Alexander of Idaho became the first Jewish state governor in 1915. Gerald Ford was inaugurated in 1974, and within a month he pardoned his predecessor, Richard Nixon, of all federal crimes. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev was less forgiving of his predecessor when he made a speech denouncing Joseph Stalin. John Diefenbacher became prime minister of Canada in 1957, and coming full circle for surnames, Harold Washington became the first African-American mayor of Chicago in 1983.

Health

In the same year that Khrushchev was denouncing Stalin, André Cournand and Dickinson Richards received the Nobel Prize for Physiology/Medicine, for their work on a technique for introducing a catheter into the heart. Robert Koch received the prize for his investigations into tuberculosis in 1905, while in 1993 Michael Smith was similarly rewarded for work on splicing DNA segments – the first genetic engineering.

Invention

In 1874, Joseph Glidden developed a way to splice sharpened pieces of metal together, resulting in his patenting of barbed wire. This invention eventually transformed the American West since large-scale barriers to livestock could be constructed for the first time. In 1971, Momofuku

Ando contributed to modern cuisine by launching the world's first instant noodles in a plastic pot.

War and Peace

1900 saw the first flight of the LZ1 – the first airship, or Zeppelin, as they become known after their designer, Ferdinand von Zeppelin. The next year, the Royal Navy launched its first submarine, based on a design by John Holland. Holland's political sympathies were with an independent Ireland, and his original designs were funded by the Fenian Brotherhood, who hoped that submarines would prove an effective weapon against the Royal Navy. Towards the end of the century, in 1998, John Hume received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work for peace in Northern Ireland.

In between, Norwegian polar explorer and oceanographer Fridtjof Nansen was also awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1922. He was High Commissioner for Refugees for the League of Nations, and one of his initiatives was to award passports to those fleeing the Russian revolution. Forty years later, former Nobel Laureate for Medicine, Linus Pauling, was awarded the Peace prize for his campaigning to control the use and spread of nuclear weapons in 1962.

The First Museum

Elias Ashmole, lawyer, scholar and antiquary, was one of the world's great collectors. He had inherited items collected by John Tradescant, and added many more items to the collection. The collection included the 'Mantle of Powhatan' – Powhatan being the Native American chief and father of Pocohontas; 'The earliest known English Landscape painting' (by Sir Nathaniel Bacon); an ostrich egg with hunting scenes carved on it; The Seal of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector; Cromwell's death mask; Guy Fawkes' lantern; and a variety of weaponry and footwear from India, China, Barbary (North Africa) and Europe. In 1679, in order to house these and other artefacts, Ashmole founded the world's first purpose-built museum – the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

Chapter 11

Age sixty-seven

Twisted eponyms

Elbridge Gerry was one of the signatories of the American Declaration of Independence. He later became governor of the State of Massachusetts, and in 1812, he signed a controversial redistricting bill. The boundaries of the electoral districts were drawn in strange shapes to benefit Gerry's supporters. One district was supposedly shaped like a salamander, but someone commented that this was in fact a 'gerrymander' – and coined the word, still used to denote this type of attempt to influence the result of an election. In 1858, German mathematician August Möbius first described the properties of another unusual shape. He noted that if you take a strip of paper and give it a half-twist before joining the two ends, you make a surface that has only one side, one edge, and remains in one piece if cut lengthways. This surface is now known as the Möbius strip.

Presidents

Returning to American politics, Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill creating NASA in 1958, the same year the Charles de Gaulle became president of France. In 1973, Erskine Childers Jr. became president of the Republic of Ireland. This was particularly sweet for him since his father, Erskine Childers Sr., had been executed in 1922 in the Civil War that followed the establishment of the Irish Free State.

Stage and screenplays

George Bernard Shaw's play 'St Joan' opened in New York in 1923. Shaw would later receive the Nobel Prize – an achievement he shared with Luigi Pirandello, who was awarded the prize in 1934, and Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet celebrated in the film 'Il Postino', who achieved the same in 1971. In 1951, Josephine Hull won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her performance in 'Harvey', which also starred James Stewart and an invisible rabbit.

Music

Back in Milan, Giacomo Puccini's opera 'Turandot' opened in 1926. Thomas Beecham founded the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1946, and Bing Crosby was awarded a second platinum disk in 1970. Alfred Newman won the last of his nine Best Score Oscars for 'Camelot' in 1968.

Architecture, according to Johann von Goethe, is frozen music – whether or not that is true, Frank Lloyd Wright announced the building of the 'Falling Water' house in 1936, and engineer Joseph Strauss (no relation to the musical family) saw the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937.

Cars

In 1901, Gottlieb Daimler built a car for motor enthusiast Emile Jellinek, who held the post of Consul-General for the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Nice. It revolutionised car design, being one of the first not to resemble a horse-drawn carriage. Jellinek was impressed both at the appearance of the car and its high performance, and decided to name it Mercedes after his eleven-year-old daughter.

Chapter 12

Age seventy-one

Barriers

Winston Churchill was voted out of office at the end of World War II, but that didn't end his influence in the world. In 1946, during a speech in Fulton, Missouri, he captured the mood of the time by announcing that "from Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across Europe". The phrase 'Iron Curtain' was adopted everywhere to represent the divide between the Soviet and Western spheres of influence.

Barriers to international travel were something that Ferdinand von Zeppelin was keen to avoid, when, in 1910, the first passenger-carrying airship, the LZ7 set off carrying twenty-three journalists. In 1934, barriers to trade were at least partly relaxed when Frank Hornby, MP for the constituency of Liverpool, Everton, made a speech in Parliament proposing that there be extended shopping hours in the run-up to Christmas. Since he was the founder and owner of the train set company Hornby, and the toy car manufacturer Dinky toys, his interests were not only with the shoppers.

Politics

Someone else keen on freedom of a more fundamental kind finally managed a taste in 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Also in the political arena, François-Jules Grévy became president of France in 1879. The government of Abyssinia presented him with a zebra, which unfortunately died shortly after its arrival in Paris. On examination of the remains, it was declared a new species and named 'Grévy's zebra' after the president.

Entertainment

Oscar winners include Margaret Rutherford for her performance in 'The VIPs' in 1964, and John Houseman for his performance in 'The Paper Chase' in 1974. On the small screen, John Laurie appeared as Private Fraser in 'Dad's Army' in 1968. Some people think that there will one

day be three-dimensional moving images – if so, they will have to thank Dennis Gabor, who was awarded a Nobel Prize for his work on holography in 1971.

Many of the above, and many of those mentioned elsewhere in this book, have caught the attention of the successors of Marie Tussaud. She spent her early years making death masks of those executed during the French Revolution, but when that source of work dried up, she changed her business model and subsequently opened her famous waxwork museum in Marylebone Road, London, in 1833. It is now one of London's top tourist attractions, with an estimated two million visitors per year.

Chapter 13

My age is missing!

I hope you've enjoyed the sample chapters. Feel free to email this to your friends, particularly those whose age matches, or is soon to match, one of the ages mentioned above.

For those of you who have (or are approaching) a different age, you can check out the full printed book. This is available from the publishers www.lulu.com, and also through on-line and bricks-and-mortar booksellers.

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