

1841-1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

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By Hiram G . Cartledge

What was so special about the decade of 1841 to 1851?

Some say it was because it was a pivotal decade, which was both a time of paradox, and schism, but also involved retrenchment and the consolidation of established ideas. It was a time when Britain stood on the verge of the excitement of industrial development but seemed unable to break away from its stoical agrarian past; when on one hand, religious certainties bolstered the community whilst on the other were rallied insurrectionist movements whose agendas seemed to challenge and threaten the very basis of faith of any kind.

I maintain, however, it was because it was the decade in which stupid things like carbon paper was invented (see (1845), and phrenology (see 1843) and Captain Clyde's Patented Deep Frozen Oatmeal Biscuits (see 1847) and quantum mechanics (although not as we know them - see 1848).

In other words, the devil is in the detail, and you will find lots of them, both devils and details, unearthed here, like beetles disturbed perhaps from beneath stones which have never been upturned before, and set free to scuttle into the common mainstream.

You are perfectly free, once you have bought this book, to use these any way you wish, to stun people into silence at cocktail parties or badger people on buses who will think you are a looney.

This is because there is no copyright on jokes, so I can hardly stop you doing so, unlike vast mega-corporations intent on protecting their own money-churning interests who will send round the web-police if you even speak the name Brittany Spears out loud. Let alone print it in a book. Okay I owe you fourpence, vast mega-corporation called Sony. (But this too, is a

joke, which you can thus use for free). Just don't blame me if you get sued for doing so.

1841

The year opened as all years before and since have opened (but not including the 1342 for obvious reasons), with an extravagant display of festivities and celebrations, and fireworks, which even in those days mostly came from Taiwan.

In the Market Town of Bedford Stuyvesant quite near Stow on the Wold but some miles from Stow off The Wold, the greatest number of donkeys ever assembled in one field (43) gathered for a grand Donkey Derby. The winner was Willow Titty IV ridden by virgin jockey Vince Smethwick. Second was the euphonically named Gnip Gnapp ridden by Ephraim Bostwick, a part-time solicitor from Brighton, Massachusetts. And third was Jildy Jildy Nip My Nipples, ridden by the porn model Laura Canyon. But I fear this is more information than you may need.

In Yeovil local farmers celebrated the turning of the century by actually paying for their own drinks in the local pub on market day, which was two days later.

The publishing house of Dorrit and Strang, Curstive Street, EC1, sought to capitalize on the moment, by bringing out the first part of a part-work detailing the adventures of a fictitious serial murderer who despatched his victims by means of very hot chillies, entitled, 'The True & Gruesome History of Evil Snaves, the Famed Jalapeno Killer in the C19th ' by the popular hack writer Claude Poulenc, but it fooled no one. Not strictly true. It fooled Ernest Dodger who drove the 11.15 to Brighton from London Fields Station and was so distracted by the narrative he crashed into the back of a land-rover which an inconsiderate gypsy had parked on the track. Ten voles were killed, in the incident, and Jason Griggs who doubled as Guardsman and ceremonial outrider, sprained his big toe. A government enquiry

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

later concluded that a free-lance gravel-shoveller had been at fault by not shovelling enough gravel. His name was Edward Diggs, and of course, he denied everything and sold his story to the popular broadsheets of the time for a vast fortune.

In this year the famed philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who died in 1832 but was forwarded to 1841 as a corpse through a worm-hole, despite his lifelong disavowal of the principle of resurrection, was in fact resurrected, in the sense that his bones were cobbled together and toured around the music halls as a prancing marionette.

In this year, despite the fact that Romans had been using it for years, Lonnie Swiftkit, a Nottingham lace-maker, claimed to have discovered purple, but it fact proved to be pressure bruise on his left forearm, which had been trapped in a treadle mechanism for six days

*

Herbert Nesmith, a cheese manufacturer from Peebles on Tyne invented a method of producing a rind on cheese. Before this cheese had been sloppy and practically unmarketable, a bit like Arnold Schwarzeneger without his leather jacket, but Nesmith's invention led the way for a whole range of self-contained enrinded cheese-snacks, such as Cheese Quarters, Cheese Eighths, Cheese Thirds, Cheese Two Thirds, Baby Cheese Balls, etc., which were only undermined when his contrary neighbour, Bert Finch, invented a way of de-rinding cheese, fibrillating it, and marketing it as peelable strings ideal for including in your child's lunch-box (which, incidentally God had done for the universe, several millions of years earlier).

*

Albert Palmer invented Crazy Golf, which involved grown men, (but not women, at least not for a long time), walking around an expanse of specially landscaped countryside usually in pairs, trying to strike small white balls into a pre-arranged serious of holes in the ground. Almost immediately he also invented the golf club, which confused some people because they

couldn't decide whether it was a spindly implement designed to strike the balls, or an actual association of people who played golf (but of course, not an association which welcomed women, at least for a long time). Meanwhile Real or, Eton, Golf, continued to be played on seaside esplanades throughout the country as it had since the Rabbi Ben Ezra had potted his first shallot through the vanes of a revolving model windmill long ago before time was even invented.

*

Fred Dibnah, the famous steeplejack and horn-honker, invented body piercing by standing too near to one of his automatic rivet staplers, driven by a steam engine quaintly named Daisy. He reported only slight pain and then intense pain, and then supreme pain, which almost caused him to chew his own leg off. For years afterwards would-be Goths and other sado-masochists visited him, pleading to be similarly stapled, and possibly flayed, but since he could only do two a month, many were disappointed, which led to a Fred Dibnah Reaction Movement, which seemed to involve flinging dung at obscure Northern hillside.

Myself, I want nothing to do with it.

(*News has just reached us that Fred is Dead. I am now seriously depressed and will stop writing until tomorrow. It's the least I can do, but you will never realize whether I have done it. It's stuff like this that gives me bad dreams and wakes me up at night thinking I should have done something dreadfully important, but is only important in my dreaming mind. Sometimes I can catch it and realize what a Charlie I am, but other times I descend into a vortex of self-reinforcing fears. But, yes, that's my problem. Don't worry. Be happy.)

1842

Michaelangelo's collection of antique Cuban cigar boxes came up for auction in February, and made 4/6d, less commission. A Wiltshire pork butcher, who claimed he would keep his toenails in them, purchased them. I assume he meant his toenail clippings, since to keep the actual toenails would have meant their painful removal, but what do I know. He might have been just that weird.

*

'Secularism' was the buzzword of the year, along with 'squint-face git', a reference, I believe to a famous Whig politician, and, as always, 'blasphemy'. Its proponents achieved the right to affirm their testimony in a court of law rather than swear to it on the bible, which let's face it provided a let out, for a lot of wishy-washy namby-pambies who in fact were as god-fearing as your normal witness-bearer who knew he intended to lie through his teeth.

*

Golf was not so much invented in 1800 as re-discovered when a Scottish insurance salesman invented the Niblick, although he believed it at the time to be a small Asian deer.

*

In August a law requiring topiarists and foresters to cut back unnecessary arboreal growth to preserve the ecological diversity of the planet's ecosystem was frankly laughed out of parliament, which was much more concerned with issues of tits, rumpy pumpy, and, as ever, The French. And yet again, despite Thierry Henri falling over continuously in the penalty area, Arsenal were knocked out at an early stage of the UEFA Cup, losing three

times to Drizzle Morroco, both at home, away, and in a small shed in Ilfracombe.

*

Steam, rain, power, flames, waves, clouds, thudding pistons, oil, these were concepts which wouldn't come into being until the later years of this tantalising century, but it didn't stop Derek Turner, fellow of the Royal Academy, from attempting to paint them in 1800, but frankly he was crap. Needless to say his canvases now sell for millions.

*

On 5th November Soho became officially gay in a homosexual sense, when a wall was built around it and roadblocks set up to restrict free access. Henceforth only accredited gays, who had registered beforehand, were allowed to freely enter and leave the district. To ensure no one abused the system, they were required to wear special Speedos imprinted with a fluorescent day glow identity number, which could be recognized by optical camera systems. Since they were comfortably fitting and stylishly trendy (in a gay sense) no one really raised any objection to this, except the fat chubby gay market, whose pleas for the same system to be applied to boxer shorts or indeed khaki drills with relaxed waistbands, were considered unreasonable.

Drivers of public utility and transport vehicles, delivery vans, and such, were allowed temporary access but had to apply for a renewable three-monthly licence, which cost five guineas. Casual visitors could buy a day-ticket, but had to sign a legally binding notice forbidding them from gay-bashing, gay-bating or indeed gay-fucking, upon pain of death.

Justin Timberlake, Chief Gay on the recently inaugurated Greater London Council explained, 'We're just trying to protect our interests, and those of the owners of the many gay bars and clubs which have sprung up during the last three hundred years to cater for our delightfully debauched excesses. They make a significant contribution to the national economy, and of course, their own. And many of the concerns controlling them are not

even gay, but based in Mafia-owned syndicates, or in family-owned Asian, Jamaican and Jewish small businesses. There is, in fact, I believe, one chain of clubs which is owned by a rightwing Australian fundamentalist media tycoon, but I can't name him, or else I'd be shot.'

In January 1842 Dame Edith Wallaby was acquitted on charges of running sex parties for Whig politicians. On 2 May 1842, a petition to evict her from her grace and favour residence in Hackney was delivered to parliament. It ran to 3,315,752 names, was six miles long and weighed in at a massive six hundredweight (or 305kg). The petition was carried to the Houses of Parliament on the shoulders of 16 trade union delegates, and was so large that the doors to the House of Commons had to be dismantled for it to enter the chamber.

1843

In October of this year the popular newsheet News of the World was founded, selling at 3d. Its initial headline was 'Police accuse Vicar of Torturing Cats and Virgins in semidetached house in Rigby, near Hull'. Nothing changed for the next two hundred and fifty years, when Clive Yencil was appointed editor. And then nothing changed. Again.

*

At ten thirty-five one Wednesday morning, after a lucid dream, an inventor called Bernard Rolf, thought of the idea of a universal input device called a keyboard, in which the individual letters of the alphabet were each singly represented on an array of depressible keys, each of which sent a mechanical or else electronic message to a central controlling unit, and thus translated it into either a mechanical action or one mediated through an electronic realm. Foolishly, he couldn't think of any reason why this should be built or any possible use for it. He went on to become the maitre de maison at Wafers Nightclub in Wembley.

*

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

On 6th November the Japanese giant car manufacturer Honda tried to persuade people that their diesel engines were nicer than others by writing a catchy song about them. They didn't explain exactly how their diesel engines were nicer than others, but then they never do, do they? There's so many things we have to take on trust as we go through life, but, honestly, would the commercial pronouncements of a giant multinational corporation ever be one of them?

*

1843 marked a significant advance in the world of style and fashion with the simultaneous invention of the Thong by Rolf Offshoot and of course depilatory waxing by his cousin Cyrus. Never had there been a better example of synergy, since without Cyrus' invention Rolf's would have been disgusting. And of course without the invention of the thong, waxing would have been unnecessary since previously the popular underwear of the time, known as breechelouts in any case hid each and every part of the anatomy from the belly-button to the knees. The foremost society champion of the thong (and waxing) was the infamous transsexual beau Curtis Staggers, Third Earl of Crawley, who would openly strut semi-naked through the halls of his Pall Mall Gentleman's Club, Old Greasers, much to the disgust of the older members of the catering staff. Curtis met a sad end during a duel over a gambling debt. He foolishly wore nothing but a thong, thinking it would distract his opponent D'Arcy Smithersmith, when they met on Hampstead Heath, but with all that flesh on display it was frankly like shooting fish in a pool, whatever that is. In fact D'Arcy killed three stray homosexuals before finally despatching Curtis.

*

The Royal Festival Hall was built as a dumping ground for sundry derelicts and winos, each of whom was provided with his own cardboard box and valet parking in the immediate environs. It proved such a success similar centres were hastily constructed in most of Britain's municipal cen-

tres, such as the Birmingham Bull Ring, Wood Green Shopping City, and numerous Arndale Centres, wherever one could be found, which was most places.

The miniscule Hansen Mmmmbop comet made its closest transit of Earth in ten million years, causing tidal waves of several inches in the swimming pools of anybody in the home counties who had one. All over the nation thousands rushed out onto the streets, some to view it, but most because it was closing time. The popular tabloid the Sun prophesied the end of the world on the 14th of the month, and gave away a free DVD to celebrate to release of the summer blockbuster 'Close Transit' on the 15th

*

Phrenology was invented in 1843, when a discarded manikin ended up in the dustcart of licensed refuse collector Ephraim Midgeley, of Rotherhithe. He spent three months fondling the head, day and night, asleep and awake, and by the time he woke up, had invented phrenology, or the science of determining a person's character by fondling their head. Later Eric Clapton was to use the same technique to learn how to play the guitar, since he couldn't afford the 'Bert Weedon Play in a Day Tutor'. Of course he did it by fondling his guitar and not plastic heads. Do I have to explain everything as if you were a very rich heiress from Brazil?

In 1843 Robert Raw, a Cornish philanthropist, founded the first mobile enema company. During the next few years honouring their motto 'no job too small, no distance too far as long as it's near Padstow', they bought comfort and relief to hundreds around the Padstow area.

1844

The most important piece of legislation in 1844 was a ban on importing Zombies from Haiti. This was rushed through, after an incident when a rogue Zombie got into the country, possibly through the Channel Tunnel, but more likely on a Ketch called The Drivel Hound, which had just sailed in

from the Indies. It (he?) had attempted to infiltrate the mind of the major Irish shipping magnate, Claus Stodgerson, and persuade him to build a vast cruise ship called the e.e.cummings which would take thousands of holiday makers on cruises to Haiti, where, if they'd paid enough where their brains could be sucked out, macerated, and re-introduced to the systems of existing zombies, including George Bush. But this didn't work, due to a strict method of surveillance by the Johnny Dodgers, who were an early form of Bow Street Runners, except working for customs and excise and not John Peel. Or Anthony Trollope. Before the bill was passed six zombies managed to slipped through the net and took up important positions both in the government of the time, and as members of the royal household, albeit on a fairly menial level (one of them was a bar-tender, another a grave digger, and the two others operated the pumps that introduced chlorine into the royal swimming pools). When they were discovered they were given MBE's and repatriated.

*

Despite the fact that he had not yet been born, or indeed conceived, Albert Einstein continued to receive junk mail:

Dear Albert Einstein

Someone has suggested that time tends to speed up as you get older. Since you are the acknowledged expert on relativity (or am I wrong?) I have decided to address this query to you.

Is it true?

It feels true to me, I must say, but then I am 57, and not 58 as my wife keeps telling me I claim to be. But already I am feeling that one day seems just like the next, so I forget it. Is that what is meant by time speeding up? Or have I got it wrong? If time does speed up, would I not be whirling around at this moment subjected to vast G forces, which will mash my brain, or is there some process, which will enable me to remain cogent? I can, if you insist, invest in a crash-helmet, but it will be a significant inroad into my income. Please feel free to call collect, (no, I'm fooling) only I've left a rib

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

roast in the oven, and if the universe is about to end, presumably in a big sparkly burst of exploding nothingness, I would like to know, if only because I can comfort my cats in our final moments.

*

Little need be said about the blini, which a baker in Eselot Street, W4 invented by accident, whilst trimming his toenails in the bath, or indeed the bagel, which would not be invented for another forty years (see 1882).

*

This year also W.E. Johns wrote the first Biggles novel, 'Biggles In The Algarve'. Johns had been enticed into buying a holiday timeshare in a holiday property, by the offer of a free Rolex watch providing he attended a presentation in Highgate. Needless to say nothing came of this and, to great popular success, Johns renamed his novel 'Biggles Kills The Huns'.

In October tainted butter caused the death of the famed operatic tenor Stanley Matthews. The national butter scare and under-consumption which followed, created a vast butter mountain which was located just outside Winterton-on-Sea in Norfolk, where it became major tourist attraction and venue for activities such as skiing, lugging and synchronized butter-balling. For two months people cooked with lard, until tainted lard caused the death of Nigel Holmes, the famous Olympic cyclist; then people went back to butter, the butter mountain disappeared, and the Winterton-on-Sea Chamber of Commerce was disbanded.

Gulf War Syndrome was officially recognized as existing, but that was as a syndrome and not a disease anybody could cure. But no matter, thousands of Tommies claimed and received benefit providing they could remember they had ever served in the Gulf. Those that couldn't were forced to sever their lower limbs and give away magazines devoted to local advertising on the streets, relying on the occasional charitable contribution in recognition of this valuable service. Two men made this all possible but history has already forgotten their names. What a bummer, eh?

*

Josiah Briggs of Ainscorp, East Doolittle, invented corgis (not the corporation of registered gas installers) but a breed of dog incorporating a cross between Sealyhams, Dachshunds (or Deckhands as my spell-checker would have it) and Dottles, a rare breed of pygmy lurcher from Monmouthshire. Or possibly Powys or Gwent. They were mostly used for ferreting, which was made an official Olympic sport in the same year.

*

Gladys Swinge invented Nettle Beer and Nettle Wine, in that order. The next years she went organic and the year after that she went out of business. Will they never learn?

*

Des Lynam, a failed sports presenter, reminded us forcibly of one of the prophet Nostradamus' predictions about the year 2004:

*In July the sun will rage
A shorn man will juggle a ball and miss an empty net
In the middle of the year there will be nothing on television except
repeats and ads for Walkers crisps.
A bad American film will win a big award
But the Boston Red Sox will win the World Series after their curse is
lifted.
Oh, and one good thing, a freeview cable channel will be launched
featuring re-runs of 'Moonlighting'.*

Strangely this prophecy was realized almost 150 years later to the day. I think we should all be very scared. Especially of Des Lynam.

1845

In 1845 a shrimp fisherman called Elvis Bagues, whilst attending the film premiere of Bridget Jones Diary Part 67 (he'd won free tickets on a competition run by Radio Shrimp East Anglia FM 453, called its lad, or indeed lead, actor Steve McQueen a Twerp to his face. Since both men knew

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

the Twerp was a gaily-coloured version of the Tench (q.v.) the star was not offended, although Bogues did subsequently have to have several of his front teeth replaced at the London National Dental Hospital.

*

The famous dark-complexioned* cook and chef, Quinsley Barratt, invented the dessert Eton Fool, and was subsequently sued by the famous public school, who were notoriously litigious about suing anyone using the term Eton without permission, possibly even me. But I don't care. See: Eton Eton Eton Eton, and I'll throw in one with a lower case just to annoy them: eton.

(*This is not racist. I mention this only because there was a lighter skinned chef from Ecuador, and I wouldn't like to be responsible for any confusion. If I wanted to be racist I would say that one of them was a black bastard, which would get me arrested, not necessarily for racism, but for, general defamation, so I'm not going to say it.)

*

In 1845 Alouysius Bax invented carbon-paper by leaving a sheet of paper to smoke over a candle flame. It is not recorded why he should have done this except it is known his wife had been giving him a bad time about changing the sheets on their communal bed, and this may in fact have been an attempt to burn down his modest homestead, in East Wyoming down, possibly for the insurance, although there is no evidence he was insured (this doesn't mean he wasn't insured but that he may have been insured through some obscure off-shore banking insurance agency such as WeWillInsureYou.com. who don't ask for references but also don't leave evidence, or a traceable history trail as it's called these days.

1846

Rosy Buillard, a French post-dadaist conceptualist modernist ontologist, (who had unfortunately been refused food coupons by Marcel Duchamps during the famous existential siege of Paris three years earlier) wrote this in his infamous ‘Suicide Diaries’, (obviously completed before he actually committed suicide several years later): ‘A couple commit suicide by placing themselves before a speeding train. The driver testifies that he sees the man helping the woman across the tracks, and then they stand in the path of the train and embrace. Any imaginative person can visualize this quite adequately thanks to this graphic firsthand description, without necessarily having to see the actual event. On the same day in Iraq Islamic insurgents behead a Japanese flight attendant. This is filmed and put on the net so you don’t have to make an imaginative leap to visualize it, just watch the horror, if you have the inclination. This is what happens: They knock the man over on his side and slice at his neck releasing pools of blood. They pull back on his hair, tilting the head backwards whilst sawing through the spinal column before finally wrenching the head free. They are practised butchers and it only takes fifteen seconds video time. Besides asking what kind of person does this we should of course also ask what kind of person puts it on an open website and what kind of person watches it. But I don’t think any of us will come up with pat answers. Only other, slightly more subjective questions. Such as, which is more terrible, the transient distaste one experiences when subscribing to the universally available hard evidence of man’s inhumanity, or the tender deaths that lurk and fester within the unconsummated imagination and are ready to leap out upon the slightest provocation? Beats me, as J.K. Huysmans once said.’

Okay the beheading thing was nothing to do with suicide, and like all true philosophers Rosy didn’t come up with any real answers, except that supermarkets should stay open twenty-four hours every day, except on Sunday, when they would close down early and not re-open until eight o’clock

on Monday, which really pisses you off if you want to buy a Twix before eight o'clock on Monday morning.

*

Marcel Duchamps constructed his famous 'Large Glass', which he sold to Charles Saatchi for £2 million, since Charles needed a window for his the new holiday home he had built in Deal, which was rapidly acquiring a reputation as the gay Mecca of the South West, not of course that there's any link there between gayness and Charles Saatchi. It's this sort of random mis-assignment of sexuality in the hands of uneducated people, or politicians as they're called, which always gets us social commentators in trouble. At least that's what we'll say when they sue us. I mean is Tracey Emen gay and does she shit in the woods? The answer is no on both counts, I believe. Duchamps moved to the Isle of Capri to spend the rest of his life painting the toe-nails of the famous English singer Gracie Fields, only venturing out to shoot at swallows overhead on their way to Africa. On his deathbed, he was reported to have said, 'Dadism, ceci merde, et l'Existentialism aussi'.

Let he who can speak French be the first to argue with him.

*

In May the pop singer Ronnie Size was arrested and charged with illicit fly-posting and also for re-decorating the Queen's bedroom with flock wall-paper bought as surplus from an Indian Restaurant in Tenby. He pleaded guilty at an early stage of the trial and thus was allowed a third off the normal sentence for such an offence, which was two days community service. The clerks of the court had such difficulty handling the mathematics that they let him off with a pat on the head. Call that justice?

*

Cillit Bang – household cleaner or Nuclear deterrent? This eternal question was answered by the part-time philosopher, and full-time philanderer, Norman Gryke, whilst in a restaurant in Stoke Newington, who tried to write it on the back of a cigarette packet, but found there was no room due

to government health warnings, so he forgot it. He didn't think of tearing open the packet and writing in on the inside, a demonstration of such stupidity that he makes you wonder whether he had the answer in the first place. (*It is in fact the made-up name of famous porn star).

In 1846 the Amateur Naked Rugby League cup final between the Walthamstow Warriors and the Billericay Bears ended in disarray with only six players on the field. The referee abandoned the match because he was unable to identify which team was which.

Later in April, the editor of the Spectator, Boris Karloff wrote the following tirade: In Dictionary of Idiocy, a notoriously un-annotated and un-referenced work by Stephen Bayley, this nincompoop writes, 'Twenty per cent of Jews (author's aside: a suspiciously round figure) appear to have a genetic mutation which causes a disagreeable reaction to alcohol. The mutation increases the level of acetaldehyde, the toxin, which gives hangovers their characteristic features. Thus Israel has one of the lowest levels of alcoholism in the developed world.'

One's reaction is, first of all, to question the fact, such as it is. Is he reporting a true record of the substantial fact, both of a chemical and statistical nature. If he is this begs the question of why aren't programmes in place by responsible governments to pass the genetic mutation on, for the common good, or indeed by the less responsible ones to ensure that any remedy is stamped out so that revenue from alcohol will not be affected? Of course, the answer is it's all a piece a shit and there are other reasons than genetic ones for the absence of alcoholism in Israel, which possibly a racist wouldn't be able to recognize. And, the clincher, anyway since when did the threat of a hangover stop anyone drinking to excess?

You may ask yourself why I am pursuing this line of thought with such vehemence. It is because I am Boris Karloff and I have been traduced on many occasions during my life, especially during James Whales' 'Bride of Frankenstein'.

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

*

In November Jeff Beck scored an early version of ‘Hi Ho Silver Lining’ for the Harmonium, Triangle, and Sackbut and premiered it at the Fuller’s Brewery Annual Christmas Dinner Dance held at the Fuller’s Sports & Social Club in Chiswick. During the ensuing knees-up three brewery workers collapsed from heart failure and six from liver failure. This was considered a success, of some kind, by the management who had been investigating possible programmes of early retirement, and Jeff was booked for the next eight years in succession, after which he was superseded by chart-toppers Lieutenant Pigeon, supported by local group, the Burlingtons.

*

In July, Onus Willis, a technician working for the Smith Klein Glaxo Corporation discovered link between chickpeas, Johnny Cash, colon cancer and Canelleto (that’s the Venetian artist, not the brand of spaghetti named after him). The link was that they all had ‘c’ in their name, which was a patently stupid link. Nevertheless, Smith Klein Glaxo went on to develop very expensive treatment for it. Onus committed suicide out of remorse the following year, but you won’t find this mentioned then, because it is frankly depressing. Just pencil it into the margins of your printed edition, if you have one. And care.

*

The first screening of the Richard & Judy Show was aired. This was based on a popular booth-based seaside entertainment and used the same techniques of verbal and indeed physical abuse, involving rolling pins and wife and baby abuse, whilst Richard Madeley shouted gleefully, ‘That’s the way to do it’.

1847

Lord Lucan went missing after stealing some cheese from a Macdonald's in Swansea. He was thought to have committed suicide, wracked with guilt from the incident, which was recorded on closed circuit TV, but his body was never found. Numerous rumours about his whereabouts abounded, included sightings of him in Perivale, Wolverhampton, Guernsey and Plosepta, a small village on the shore of lake Tittikaka. It is now generally accepted that he changed his name to Lucas Lord, and started a new life as a Muslim greengrocer in Halifax.

*

Verbal diarrhoea was officially recognized as a sexually transmitted disease, as evidenced by sufferers tendency to scream oh yes yes yes yes come come come yes oh yes oh yes oh yes come come. Oh course sado-masochists would vary this by throwing in the occasional, hit me it me hit me beat me thrust thrust. It's a funny old world, isn't it, especially if you're trying to find a quarter pounder with cheese in Swansea.

*

Someone called Nog invented the Biro, but since his name was Nog, it never caught on. If only he'd been called Biro we'd have had the Biro much sooner and history, as well as cheques would have been much more legible much sooner. The world of ballpoints and international banking is indeed cruel, as are parents who inflict the name Nog* upon you.

*Having said that research has shown that the word 'Nog' is the single word in the universe which has no adverse connotations whatsoever in any known language, including the rare Umphali-twik-twik language spoken only on the single planet of a star system known as Quarg, in sector 476 . (This was something realized many years ago by Peter Firmin, of course.) Nissan are launching their new Nissan 'Nog' very soon, whilst Garnier has a 'Nog' range of hair treatment on the stocks (featuring Ovamide©). Because you're worth it and because you're also a blonde Viking called Noggin.

*

Captain Clyde's Patented Deep Frozen Oatmeal Biscuits were one of the hits of the year in 1847, at the International Frozen Food Exposition held in Helsinki. Japanese Polar Explorers cued around the block for a sample and a PDF file explaining how they could go on-line to make a bulk purchase. Unfortunately none of the technology to support this had been invented yet, since Mrs & Mrs Gates had yet to couple and produce the Godhead of Microsoft, or the Godfiend, if you prefer, Bill Swachniki aka Gates (named after his third maternal grandmother, and a device for keeping cattle out of a field).

1848

The famed forensic scientist and part-time colonoscopist Bernard Spilsbury wrote the world's first haiku:

*Colonoscopy
is fun - lie down and it's done
Just like sex really*

*

Bernie Ecclestone invented Formula 1 soapbox derby, in which people gathered over weekend on a hillside in Hebden Bridge and rolled downhill in unmotorized wheeled vehicles constructed from bits of wood and old prams. Most of Bernie's income came from the sale of peripherals such as T-shirts, Track-Suits, Hoodies, Sweaters, Tote-bags, Sports Shoes, Male grooming products, video game licenses, and of course cigarette advertising. Very soon he was a millionaire but never forgot his roots, mostly because he had never remembered them in the first place.

*

The Dork Manufacturing Company of Upper Abercrombie, East Neath, manufactured the first Dork© This range of smiling and grinning fools was originally designed to gradually replace all existing politicians but

they ran into difficulties when the compound used in the manufacture of the Dork's© teeth started to spontaneously explode whilst being interviewed.

*

Julian Smackhead, a pimp from Broadstairs, pitched the idea for a TV reality show to be called 'Nude roller-blading in the Hamptons' to be presented by Magenta Divine, which was, in itself, a horrible thought. But since neither television, nor roller-blading had yet been invented, nor the Hamptons discovered, and populated by rich Americans, nor Magenta Divine born, and public nudity was as yet only a twinkle in the brain of the Rastafarian prophet Nobby Rizla, it fell on deaf, if not non-existent ears, and we would have to wait several thousand years for Channel Five to bring us this tantalizing programme, and several thousand more for a cable company to connect us so we could actually see it.

*

Kelp Ductile, a sophomore at Kent State University, Dulwich, Nebraska, just down the road from the U.S. National Rifle Testing Range in East St Cynthia, finally proved the existence of the long-suspected time dilation effect, which states that the older you get the quicker time passes. When you're 65 you sit down with a bottle of beer in the evening to watch Richard & Judy and before you know it you're watching CI Miami. Then it's two o'clock in the morning and the screen is blank because someone or something has come it and turned off the TV. When you're 65 you no longer have time to lie in bed and dream like you could when you're sixteen, mostly because someone is always waking you up because you're snoring. But why should we be surprised? The whole theory, after all, is only logical, because when you're very old and take your last breath, zip, time is gone in an instant. This is called Ontology. If you don't already know about it, don't worry because you're probably already too old to have time to read the books. Zip.

*

The fat suit was invented in the 19th Century, contrary to popular opinions, not to help underweight Hollywood stars play bulked out roles, but to put off the lecherous advances of farmers and landlords who had an eye for their milk-maids, but also had an inbred aversion to rogering anyone already suspected of being pregnant. As, surely, have we all. I may have to be more specific here for the hard of learning: the suits were worn by the milk-maids not the farmers, got it? Although a certain breed of fey, unapproachable, intrinsically shy farmers could have derived some benefit from them, I suppose. I mean they could use it to intimidate sheep into submission, if that was their inclination But I think you know what I mean.

*

Quantum Mechanics (although not as we know it) was first developed by a U.S. Navy recruit, namely Boilerman First Class Ralph Dodger, from Kroitville, Illinois, who, whilst serving a term on a recycled Liberty Ship, the USS Crabville, once looked at his wrench, capable apparently of loosening or tightening nuts on any boiler assembly in the Western hemisphere, and questioned its basic purpose (he was a bit dim). Hardly surprisingly, Nils Bohr picked up on this shameful display of American inadequacy under fire, and went on to develop real quantum mechanics, which didn't even involve any dirty overalls.

1849

By 1849, the year in which Justin Twiglet invented the eponymous cornmeal savoury snack, the Aristotle Onassis Bicentennial Exposition in Athens, Greece had been over for four years, as had the Ralph Nader Exposition in Athens, Georgia, except for six years. Dame Matilda Thussock's Small Garden Party Exponential in the New Garden Town of Babylon, Essex, quite near Thurrock, with its Buckminster Fullerite dome housing a display of stuffed leverets, had never really got off the ground, but at least leverets could feel it was safe to walk the face of the Earth again. If they ever had.

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

*

In January Jaunty Sluice the well known escape artist posted bills around the popular London theatres announcing he had perfected his latest triple-bolt underwater escape and inviting audience to gather at 10.30 am on the 12th, on the Thames, just south of the Tower of London to observe this miraculous feat. Only six days later his undertakers posted notices inviting the general public to his funeral at Abney Wood cemetery in North London. Ten people, including six creditors, attended.

*

That same month Normal Slatt invented the mechanical gerbil, which he thought would bring emotional respite and succour to hoards of lonely old people who hithertofore had to put up with the idiosyncratic and sometimes messy behaviour of real small furry animals. It failed to take off but he put this down to an early marketing decision not to offer trading stamps with every purchase.

*

Gambling was made illegal for two days, in February, for some bizarre reason known only to the government of the time. They also attempted to outlaw public histrionics, but since no one actually knew what constituted public histrionics, this too, despite the support of several wealthy ex-whigs, and one or two harlots who had the ears of important dignitaries, fell by the wayside and was written off as a piece of misguided legislation.

*

John Little, known as Racing's Darling, because of his effeminate hairstyle, won the Derby this year on the little-fancied outsider, Sangria Pops. Other well attended sporting events included the FBA heavyweight boxing match between Pope Julius IV, of Vatican City, and Daryll Quain III, a heavy-hitting puncher from Swain's Avenue in Basildon. Pope Julius won on a TKO, but was later defrocked for exposing himself to a novice in a toilet, in Basildon as it happened. But Daryl went on to launch a very successful line of monogrammed boxer shorts, so who is to say who really won?

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

*

In April, a Mormon Rotarian, Giles Grimly, from Grimsby, invented Associated Football, and also the first football club, Grimsby Rovers. However nobody took him seriously, so the mighty behemoth of the idea that was organized football, complete with organized vandalism and mayhem, would slumber for several decades until the rise of Alex Ferguson,

So much for sport.

*

What of the arts and crafts?

Sadly, there were very little arts during 1849. A few sad potters made sundry urns, mallicks, and todger-cosies, but they were all pretty derivative, except when Dame Julia Quench of the Malden School attempted to fashion a sixteen foot tall flower jug, decorated with a glaze derived from gazpacho soup, which now sits in an reinforced underground bunker of the Wallace Collection, capable, for some reason, of withstanding a direct hit from a nuclear missile. A left wing activist Bill Norris from Sizewell B, attempted to paint an allegorical portrait incorporating 12 dead communists at the last supper of Christ, but since communism hadn't been invented yet, he failed, and had to clean his canvas with turpentine, and recycle it as a pair of jeans.

*

An attempt to introduce digital radio also failed, as it always would whenever subsequently attempted.

*

There were almost no wars in 1849, except the war of Guadalcanal, which had been teleported in from another dimension and resulted in much loss of life, but fortunately none of it significant. since time was not only running out for General Yamamoto, but had already expired. Oh yes, there was the I famous War of Highgate Woods School were a band of extremely naughty and militant school-children armed with Uzi sub-machine guns, and

Claymore mines, held the local community terrorized for six months, after demanding that particularly vile dinner-lady, Alma Throg, be sacked for expectorating in the soup. The matter was not settled until the local chief of police, Dudley Sweat, flew to Munich to sign a note of appeasement and thorough abnegation. In the mayhem that followed only three teachers were ritually castrated.

*

In the field of literature The Very Reverend Jefferson Simley wrote his seminal work. 'The Function of Sperm', in which he contended this useful bodily emission had been provided by God as a means of attaching postage stamps to letters. Since Trollope has not yet invented the penny post, or even the subsequent £6.00 post (circa 2009, AD) he was generally ridiculed for this theory. Captain H.J. Bosworth wrote up his memories of life among the savage tribes of East London, as 'With Gun & Camera in Darkest Ilford' and went on to promote his book extensively with slide-show lecturers, which included handy advice on how to fit an in-car entertainment system into a Volkswagen Golf GTI.

*

Abel Resnick of Huddersfield opened his first stack'em high and sell 'em cheap superstore, called Resnicks. Unfortunately he stacked them too high and had to pay out fortunes to his staff as a result of industrial accidents caused by collapsing piles of goods which hadn't been shored up with RSJs. He died, embittered after signing over the leases of his properties to Adolf Sainsbury, who, unfortunately, would go on to make exactly the same mistakes.

*

1849 was a good year for veterinary surgery. You just have to take my word for that. Also, Captain Jarvis's famed expedition to Mangoland, in the West Indies, came back with lots of mangoes, which he sold to Toad Flaxett, a theatrical entrepreneur who had just opened production of

‘Ghandi: The musical’ (book by Ben Elton) at the Shaftsbury Theatre and knew his audiences would be in need of vast quantities of ripe fruit.

*

In 1849 the cinematography pioneer Hollywood Gance, gave up his attempts to produce a workable cine-camera from cardboard and pumice-stone because it was too difficult. Instead he invented the long-distance transatlantic aeroplane and flew to California where, in partnership with a lonely itinerant called Howard Hawks, he decided to go into fruit farming and bought up vast tracts of real estate to dedicate to orange, lemon, lime, and grapefruit groves. Later when other cinematographic pioneers visited Hollywood, as it had become called, seeking a warm and sunny climate, in which they could make their films, the embittered Gance refused to sell out. Thus this early incursion into a possible film industry was nipped in the bud, and film-makers were forced to seek other locations such as Bromley, Feltham and Skegness, where in fact, some of the best films of the likes of Arnold Schwarzeneger and Bruce Willis were later made.

*

In September Johnny Wobblers produced a series of designs for a carpet cleaner which, due to a series of rotating cylinder tubes producing a cyclone effect, would not lose suction. Unfortunately he was shot by his lover Giovanni Versacci, before his design got of the ground. Isn’t the world of cleaning and high fashion cruel?

*

In October several famous male ballet dancers met at a supper party in a vast house in Highgate. Between them they formulated and invented a concept called gay sex which would go on to vex, and yet also delight, many people for the next several hundred years. Almost at the same time some radical free-thinking pseudo-intellectual libertines calling themselves post-modern situationalist Dadaists, met just down the road, in a semi-detached house on the Hornsey Borders, but all they invented was chronic constipation and a wistful yearning for an age which had somehow passed them by.

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

One of them was called Virginia Woolf, who held down a job as a transvestite nanny in the household of a wealthy local publisher. Most days she would take the children, Stephanie and Voss, out to play in the sand-pit at the local playground in the grounds of Alexander Palace, where she would flirt with the local gay roller-blade girls, and make notes about a doomed novel featuring a depressed woman hooked on cough medicine to be called ‘Mrs Galloway’.

*

The year closed with vast celebrations, including a big fireworks display, which not only burnt down the royal dockyards at Chatham, and the Seat of Arthur (which was not in fact a throne made of exotic woods, but a cheap motor-car, with a chassis made in the newly devolved Russian republics, and an engine refashioned from spare parts in Cuba, which happened to belong to someone called Arthur, the car that is, not Cuba. It also burnt down Wembley Stadium and the house of Mrs McNally next door. One of her lodgers was a shy, self-effacing man called Albert Einstein, who would later go on to be responsible for a tawdry toy called the atom bomb, Although he later disputed the authorship of this and blamed it on Enrico Fermi, and a Welsh comedian called Max Boyce, although I might have got this wrong.

*

Lots of bargains were to be had in 1849 for the careful shopper. Drizzle was really cheap, as were photographs of George Bush with Nancy Pelosi. Old sets of Meccano and Lego were expensive, but incomplete sets of Bayko, the miniature house brick building system, could be obtained for the equivalent of two cheese vouchers or five milk ones. (I’ve just realized I have completed this overview of 1849, without mentioning Scotland, once. No. I’m wrong, because I just mentioned it.)

1850

Gyles Brandeth©, the well known brand of universal purgative based on a mixture of opium, sennapods, coal tar, and violets, first came into popular use. Its initial use caused such a flood of effluent into Charles Bazelgettes newly constructed system of underground sewers, that the Thames ran an ever richer muddy brown than normal for several months. Millions of gallons were diverted to feed the slurry pits of manure manufacturers throughout the Home Counties, but not enough to prevent an extraordinarily high spring tide breaching the Thames embankment and backing up solid waste as far as Fulham. Matthews Pews and Sons, of Wakefield, made a killing manufacturing a special range of galvanised shit-shovels, but they were probably the only people to profit from the whole sorry debacle. Still, shit happens.

*

In July a Dominican novice called Cliff Spinal Vulva, due to an unfortunate birth defect, discovered a message in the book of Esau, whilst decoding the bible using skip-codes, which hinted that Tench (the fish) were heretical. A Papal bull, or possibly a Barbel, was issued which called for the castration or maybe the sequestration (a possible slip of the quill) of anyone found fishing for Tench, (aka Twerp) and also a sound walloping for anyone catching a Rudd, and a sound rudding for anyone catching a Wallop, all of which were, apparently closely related species. The same search of the book of Esau also revealed the message ' Bevelled gnomes are quaintly greasy', but no one could work out what it meant, except that possibly bevelled gnomes were quaintly greasy. If you find one in your garden and give can give me an accurate report on either its greasiness, its quaintness, or bevelled nature, less me know. (No, don't).

*

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

In August the Shanklin Zoo on the Isle of Wight claimed to have taken delivery of a live Wookie, and, no not just an actor in a suit. The next day the far more responsible but less successful Shanklin Zoo which was just next door, but not owned by the infamous publicity-seeking Shanklin Brothers, issued a press release reminding the public that there was no such thing as a Wookie, and that it was in fact only the product of the fevered imagination of a repressed right-wing militarist American film director who probably hadn't even been born yet, and yes, it was just an actor in a suit.

They were probably right, but lots of kids got a buzz that year by going to visit a man in a cage in a suit, who gibbered convincingly, having been trained by voice coach, Phil Jupitus, whilst the Shanklin Zoo's famous real white Bengal tiger lapsed into terminal decline because of lack of attention, and was forced to take an Open University Course in Creative Writing, which did in fact, much later, lead to the universal best-seller 'Simla, or Bust'. But that was much later.

Their sloths and lemurs didn't actually inspire people, either. And none of them produced a novel.

Postscript

So what have we learnt from all this, apart from the general futility of historical research. Well, we have certainly not learnt where to find the cheapest burger, although Grinsteads Boutique Charcuterie, Café and Gift Shop in Filey comes close, providing you don't go for the Kiddie Meal where the price is bumped up to allow for the supposedly 'free' toy, a plastic model of Anne Widdecombe which is not only garish but unnecessarily sexually explicit. Nor have we learnt the difference between a serviette and a napkin despite this being an issue which I am told is of some concern to our transatlantic brethren. This document also represents only a selection of the various marvels and cultural developments that abounded in the century under scrutiny. A large volume would have surely included the Extremely Small Hadron Collider, Fenwick's recyclable cardboard dibber, Jensen Button's Patented Travelling Spitoon©, Lord Tooley's inflatable sporran ('A boon for all Scotsman falling on hard times'), and Sandy Toksvig's automatic hydraulic stilts, all of which deserve more lengthy discussion than we have room for here. We have perhaps learnt that if we had been born into that century, we would at least have lived in an age where the horrors of nuclear weapons, Ian Botham, and transcendental meditation had yet to be realized.

Not that that is any real comfort to us who still have to endure them.

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED

1841 – 1851: A DECADE DISSECTED