



LEGENDS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

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KING ARTHUR

King Arthur is one of the most famous English monarchs, but what if he never really existed? Arthur, also known as Arthur Pendragon, was a legendary British king whose ascension to the throne dates back over 1500 years. There is no agreement among scholars whether the figure of Arthur was based on a real, historical person or not. In fact, most historians admit that he was likely a fictional folk hero, brought to life by medieval romances and legends that presented him as a king of wonders and marvels.



According to legend, Arthur was the firstborn son of King Uther Pendragon. The royal baby was born during very turbulent times, when the Saxons invaded Celtic land. Merlin, a wise magician, advised the king that to protect his life, Arthur should be raised in secrecy, and away from his royal background. When King Uther died, his subjects disagreed and even fought over who should next wear the crown.



Merlin the magician sought to settle things once and for all by using his magic to set a sword in a stone at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, which only the legitimate heir to the throne of England could pull out. As expected, queues of the strongest men in the land, including people from all backgrounds, tried and failed to pull the sword from the stone. Young Arthur, who was not aware of his true identity nor of the magic contained within the sword, happened to need a weapon when his friend participated in a tournament, and quite by chance, he withdrew the sword from the stone with relative ease, and was declared king.

The newly crowned King Arthur gathered a group of brave knights and together they fought against the Saxons, who were invading the country. Arthur's magical sword was called "Excalibur", and with its help he defended Celtic land.

King Arthur built a castle called Camelot, where his twelve most trustworthy knights met at the famous Round Table to discuss current affairs and make important decisions. Legend has it that the king requested the table should be made in a circular shape specifically so that all of his knights felt equal to one another.

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table established relative peace across the land, carried out many heroic deeds and fought together against terrible beasts. They also led a quest to find the Holy Grail – the cup that Jesus Christ drank from at the Last Supper.

At an older age, Arthur was fatally wounded in battle. His body was never found, and he is believed to be resting under a hill with his knights, ready to return when England needs them again.



SCOTLAND AND THE THISTLE

The purple thistle is said to be the oldest national flower on record and the legend of how it was adopted as the symbol of Scotland dates back to the 13th century.



With Scotland and Norway only separated by an ocean, the Vikings and their famous longships were able to sail across to Britain for raids every summer from their first venture westwards in the 9th century. During hundreds of brutal years for Britain, Scandinavian countries established their own farming land and political rule, and a large portion of Scotland came to be under the rule of the kingdom of Norway. The rule was largely beneficial for the invaders, but realistically they had very little interest in this territory. Scots started to rebel and make claims of independence, and in the summer of 1263, King Haakon of Norway decided enough was enough. He set off with a massive fleet of longships for the Scottish coast, to firmly plant the Norwegian flag down on Scotland once and for all.

According to legend, King Haakon's Norsemen wanted to attack at night to surprise the sleeping Scots. In order to move quietly, under the cover of darkness, the attackers took off their shoes and tiptoed barefoot closer and closer to the villages. When Haakon's men stood on the prickly plants, they could not help but cry out in pain. The shrieking Norsemen alarmed the Scottish warriors, who jumped out of bed and defeated the enemy at the Battle of Largs, saving Scotland from Scandinavian tyranny for good. The important role that the purple thistle had played in the victory was recognised, the purple plant became known as the "Guardian Thistle", and it was chosen as Scotland's national emblem.

Known as "the Battle of Largs", the overcoming of King Haakon's forces has been described in literature as a great Scottish victory. In truth, it only involved a fraction of the Norwegian fleet, as most of the ships were on other campaigns throughout Europe. What also helped the Scots was the fact that King Haakon fell ill and died during his campaign against Scotland. His death was the beginning of the end for Scandinavian rule in Scotland, and however large a part the thistle played in the battle, it remains symbolic for Scottish freedom even today.

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

Saint George is considered to be rooted in English history, serving as England's own patron saint with his own dedicated day (23rd April), but not only was he born outside of England, it is also strongly believed that he never actually set foot on British soil. He was born in the beautiful region of Cappadocia, Turkey, in the 3rd century AD into a Christian family. When he was a teenager, he joined the Roman army as a soldier, and he served under the pagan Emperor Diocletian. He was a brave and respected soldier, and when the Emperor started persecuting and killing Christians, George pleaded with him to spare their lives. George

was imprisoned and tortured for his own beliefs, but he refused to renounce his faith. He was sentenced to death and beheaded on 23 April 303 AD – and that is why St. George's Day is celebrated on 23 April.

St. George has been immortalised in a legend describing his adventures before his imprisonment, according to which there was a cruel dragon that lived by a lake near the city of Silene in Libya. The beast required a meal of two sheep per day or it would terrorise the local people by eating them instead. When the people ran out of sheep, they were forced into sacrificing their children to the dragon. Since no parent wanted to offer their own child, they had to be chosen by lottery, and one day the lot fell on the king's daughter. The king was desperate and tried to plead to save her life, but since the decision was final, there was nothing he could do: the princess was dressed in a wedding gown and sent to be fed to the beast.



Terrified and awaiting her fate, George happened to be riding by, and he saw the weeping princess. He rode closer and spoke to the girl to see if he could help. She told him all about the cruel dragon and the chaos he had been raining on the city. She begged George to go away and save himself, but just then, the evil dragon emerged. The brave knight drew his sword, made the sign of the cross, and struck the beast, wounding it severely. He then asked the princess to throw him her belt, and he put it around the dragon's neck. When he did so, the dragon became as meek as a lamb and followed them on a leash to the city. The people of Silene were terrified when they saw the dragon, but George offered to kill it if they agreed to place their faith in God and accept the teachings of Christianity. According to legend, fifteen thousand men, including the king, accepted the Christian faith, and then George killed the dragon, as he had promised.



The legend of St. George and the dragon became very popular during the Middle Ages, as the teachings of Christianity spread, and the story was known all over Europe. St. George was admired by medieval knights and his emblem was adopted by Richard the Lionheart and brought to England in the 12th century. King Edward III made St. George the country's official patron saint when he came to the throne in the 14th century. Apart from England, St. George is also the patron saint of many other countries, including Canada, Greece, Russia, Portugal, Palestine, Ethiopia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Georgia, which was even named after him.

ST. DAVID

Saint David, also known as Dewi Sant in Welsh, is the only native-born patron saint of the countries in Britain and Ireland. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but David is believed to have been born around the year 500 AD under very dramatic circumstances. According to legend, his mother gave birth to him on a clifftop during a fierce thunderstorm; perhaps a sign of how important he would become!



As a young man, David became a monk, an abbot and later a bishop, who spread Christianity in Wales and across other parts of the British Isles. He was a very good speaker and soon became a well-known preacher with many followers.

St. David chose to be a vegetarian, an unusual life practice in those days, and his monks also followed a simple and disciplined lifestyle. He was reputed to have lived on a diet of leeks and water – which may be the reason why the leek became a national symbol of Wales. It is also believed that during a battle against the Saxons, David advised Welsh soldiers to wear leeks in their hats so that they could be distinguished from their enemies - which may be another explanation for the special status this vegetable enjoys as one of the emblems of Wales.

Legend has it that David was a miracle worker. He was said to have restored a blind man's vision and to have brought a dead boy back to life. The most famous of David's miracles, however, took place while he was preaching to a large crowd, when some of the eager listeners started complaining that they could not hear him. At that moment, a white dove sent from heaven landed on David's shoulder, and the ground on which he was standing rose and formed a hill so that David could be seen and heard by everybody.

St. David is believed to have died on 1st March in 589 AD. After his death, his influence spread far and wide. In 1120, David was canonised as a saint and later he was declared patron saint of Wales. St. David's Day has since been celebrated on 1st March every year.

ST. ANDREW AND THE SCOTTISH FLAG

Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, and his story begins in Galilee in the 1st century AD, where he was born, grew up, and became a fisherman. He was baptised by John the Baptist and became one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, along with his brother, Simon Peter. Andrew was ordered to be crucified by the Romans in 60 AD., just as Jesus was, but Andrew requested an X-shaped cross as he felt he was not worthy to die in the exact same way as Jesus. This crucifixion is represented on the Scottish flag as a white cross in a blue sky. The flag of Scotland, also known as the Saltire or the Saint Andrew's Cross, is

the oldest flag in Europe, and there is quite an interesting story behind how it became the national flag of Scotland.



Legend has it that in 832 AD an army of Scots and Picts led by King Angus MacFergus, was surrounded by a far more numerous army of Angles and Saxons. King Angus was afraid that his army might lose and so he started to pray to St. Andrew for help. The saint appeared to Angus in a dream, and the king promised St. Andrew that if he helped him win the battle, then he would become the patron saint of the country. The following morning, a strange cloud appeared in the blue sky, forming a white diagonal cross, which looked like the cross on which the saint had been crucified. King Angus and his army believed this was a good omen for them; the Angles and Saxons, on the other hand, were disheartened and scared of it. They lost their nerve, and as a result, also lost the battle. King Angus kept his promise and St. Andrew's cross has been the Scottish flag ever since. Picts and Scots were united in 843 AD by Kenneth MacAlpin, the new kingdom was called Scotland, and St. Andrew became its patron saint.

ST. PATRICK AND THE SNAKES

Snakes are found in deserts, forests and mountains- almost everywhere in the world. Except New Zealand, Hawaii, Iceland, Greenland, Antarctica and, of course, Ireland. Legend has it that St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, exterminated all of the island's snakes by driving them into the sea where they drowned.

While it is true that apart from zoos and pet shops there are no native snakes on the Emerald Isle, the island's geography shows us that the infamous reptiles never actually arrived there in the first place. During the most recent ice age, the country was too cold for most animals to survive, and furthermore, when the climate of Ireland finally became warmer and the ice started to melt, the land bridge between Ireland and the rest of Europe had already become flooded before any snakes were able to cross it. So how did the legend of St. Patrick and the snakes originate? Most scholars agree that the reptiles symbolise evil and paganism, which St. Patrick also banished from the island.



Interestingly, St. Patrick also known as the Apostle of Ireland, was not Irish himself. He was born in Roman Britain around the 5th century AD into a family of Roman clergymen. When he was 16, he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and taken to Ireland as a slave, where he was made to herd sheep. During his six years of slavery, Patrick became deeply religious and decided to give his life to God. Eventually, he managed to escape and find his way home to his family, and then he studied religion and became a priest.



Even though he was a free man again, Ireland remained in his heart, and according to his own account, he would often hear the cries of the Irish in his dreams at night-time; the cries were calling for him to return and free the people from paganism. When St. Patrick was ordained as a bishop, he returned to Ireland to spread the word of God and within thirty years of his missionary work he had converted most of the island's inhabitants to Christianity. He helped build churches throughout Ireland and the communities he had founded gave rise to many new cities and villages.

Saint Patrick is credited with not only bringing Christianity to Ireland, but also with using the shamrock, which later became Ireland's most recognizable symbol. According to legend he used the three-leaf clover to explain the idea of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to the pagan Irish.

Saint Patrick's Day, which falls on March 17th, the day of the saint's death, is Ireland's official national holiday, and it is celebrated in a number of other Western countries, including the USA and Canada, where many descendants of Irish immigrants live, although the style of celebration nowadays is not quite as holy as it used to be.

ROBIN HOOD

Robin Hood is one of the most popular and widely known heroes in English folklore. The legendary outlaw lived in the depths of Nottinghamshire's Sherwood Forest, in the East Midlands, with his Merry Men. He infamously stole from the rich to give to the poor and made a name for himself as an anti-hero: doing something objectively bad for a good cause. The variety of opinions on Robin Hood are perhaps why his story has been immortalised, with his name being as famous nowadays as it was in the 12th century, as far back as his story stretches.



He is usually pictured as a young man armed with a longbow, wearing green and brown clothes, perhaps to camouflage himself within the forest, with a feathered hat called a bycocket, which was previously worn only by nobility and later reclaimed by the rising working classes to symbolise a firmer grip on power. He was outlawed for poaching deer from the royal forests. Under the cruel laws of that time, killing the king's deer was punishable by death, so after he had committed the crime, Robin Hood escaped to the woods where he lived in secrecy with his gang.

His enemies were rich and corrupt, especially the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. Despite his efforts, the Sheriff did not manage to capture Robin Hood until the return of King Richard the

Lionheart from the Crusades. Although Robin was a thief and a rebel, he supported the rightful monarch and was pardoned when King Richard returned to England. That is the legend, but did Robin really exist?



Well, no one has been able to prove beyond doubt that Robin Hood was a real person, and some people believe that he was just a fictional character, created to provide hope for the poor. Others claim that he was not one person but a combination of a few people, as several men named Robin Hood existed at different times, and it was not uncommon back then for rich men to be robbed by bandits lurking in the forests. Also, 'Robin' or 'Robert Hood' was a nickname given to petty criminals from the middle of the 13th century and it is not very surprising that the name 'Robin' sounds very similar to 'robbing'. Whether Robin Hood was a real person or not, his legend continues to this day and his ideology has been shared by many political figures throughout history.

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

This slice of Scottish folklore does not hold any political ideology like Robin Hood, nor a religious sacrifice like the legends of the patron saints, nor any real story, in fact... but who doesn't enjoy hearing about a terrifying mythical beast?

The word 'loch' is simply the Scottish Celtic word for lake, and the name 'Ness' comes from the river flowing from the north of the loch, named the River Ness. A 37 km long lake with a spine-tingling depth of 230 m, located in the remote and beautiful Scottish Highlands, it is not difficult to see why Loch Ness might be the perfect setting for a mythical creature.

Sightings of the Loch Ness Monster stretch back to the year 565, as reported in a book written a century later, when an Irish monk was warned about a beast lurking in the River Ness and killing men who were swimming and bathing nearby. The monk, named Columba, ordered one of his followers to swim in the loch, and sure enough the monster started to approach. Columba ordered the beast to stop, and not only did it stop, but it turned back and fled, for which the locals were grateful and considered this event to be a miracle.

Tales of the monster did not gain worldwide attention until 1933, when an article in a local newspaper coined the phrase "Loch Ness Monster" after a couple driving nearby watched the beast rolling its long body above and below the water some thirteen centuries after the first known sighting. Other onlookers also described the creature in great detail, stating that it



looked more like a fish but with the size of a whale, and that when it entered the water for a final time it was swallowed by a roar of bubbling foam. This was broadcast around the world, and suddenly lots of sightings ensued through the 1930s and beyond. In November 1933, one couple reported seeing the monster cross the road, right in front of their car, and descend into the water, swimming away slowly and gracefully. Hilariously, this sighting of the beast was later deemed to be nothing more than two men carrying an upturned boat across the road.

One explanation for more reported sightings around the 1930s than ever before is that a main road was completed nearby and therefore more people were passing by, especially workers and tourists. With the great allure of the Scottish Highlands causing people to gaze out of their cars, it makes sense that people may catch a glimpse of something on the water or sight a fast-moving shape. With the number of sightings increasing, the 1960s saw the mythical beast amassing its own subculture of believers. Sonar readings, search and rescue missions, and even university research campaigns all attempted to source it once and for all; unfortunately, to no avail. Whether real or not, the Loch Ness Monster, or “Nessie” as known by locals, is one of Scotland’s biggest cultural highlights, alongside tartan kilts and bagpipes, of course!

THE WELSH DRAGON

One of only three countries in the world to have a dragon on its flag, Wales has long been proud of its mythical past. The flag shows green grass, a white sky, and a large red dragon as its main feature. Bhutan, a mountainous country on the Eastern Himalayas, also has a large dragon across its flag, and its local name ‘Druk Yul’ literally translates to ‘Land of the Dragon’. Malta boasts a dragon on its flag too, though you’ll need a very close look to notice.

The history of Wales and dragons also relates to the story of King Arthur. You may remember the name King Uther Pendragon, Arthur’s father, who lived in the south of Wales, and whose surname literally translates to Dragon’s Head. You may also remember Merlin, the magician advisor to King Uther, and it is Merlin who is at the heart of Wales’ history of dragons.



When Merlin was a young man, he met a nobleman named Vortigern, walking around the Welsh hillsides and looking curiously at the landscapes. Merlin, an expert on the area, approached and enquired as to what Vortigern might be looking for. Vortigern explained that he wanted to build a castle, and he had found the perfect place, but wanted to make sure it would be strategically located in case of an attack. Merlin agreed that the spot, a hillside in Dinas Emrys, would be both beautiful and advantageous for defence. However, he warned the nobleman there was just one issue: there were two dragons that lay sleeping in an underground lake under the hill. Vortigern did not believe such nonsense and planned to build his castle anyway. Upon excavating the site, the workers noticed the holes being dug were rapidly filling with water,

and they heard louder and louder screeching sounds coming from under the hill. Eventually two dragons broke free, fighting one another, one red and one white. The red dragon won the vicious battle, but spared the lives of Vortigern and his workers, and was not seen again.

The red dragon came to symbolise the Welsh people, and the white dragon represented the Saxons, according to Merlin. Vortigern was inspired by the fighting of the dragons and went on to be a powerful warlord, adopting the red dragon as his symbol.

The symbol of the red dragon was used in battle to represent the people of Britain and was first officially adopted as a Welsh flag in 1485, when Henry Tudor, who was of Welsh origin, defeated King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. The dragon faded in popularity and did not take any place on the commonly known Union Flag in 1606, but in 1959, Queen Elizabeth II did order that the only flag to be shown on Welsh government buildings is a red dragon on a green and white background. The flag is now known all around the world and is displayed by the Welsh with pride on their cars, and worn on their sports jerseys and even their faces during rugby matches!

On a side note, in 1945, in Dinas Emrys, excavation work revealed that in the exact spot where Merlin was said to have met Vortigern for the first time, there were in fact the foundations of a 1400-year-old fort, and there was indeed an underground lake. Could dragons be real after all??

THE LINCOLN IMP

If you were tasked with choosing a symbol for your city, you may consider picking a lion to represent bravery, a wolf to represent togetherness, or an owl to represent wisdom. Not many would opt to choose a small, devilish, half-human creature such as an imp; that is, except for the people of Lincoln, England.



Steeped in history dating back to the Iron Age, and home to a grand cathedral which was once the world's tallest building for over two centuries, Lincoln is a beautiful city nestled halfway between Robin Hood's home of Nottinghamshire and the Eastern coastline of England. Lincolnshire is generally regarded as a beautiful part of the country, and so it may seem odd that the city of Lincoln has come to be associated with a pesky little menace.

The iconic Lincoln cathedral is actually home to the legend of the Lincoln imp, and if you pay a visit, you will be able to see it for yourself. According to a 14th century tale, the Devil had one day sent some of his minions out to cause trouble in the north of England, but a couple of them had wandered too far eastwards and landed on the top of a hill in Lincoln. The two imps were impressed with the beauty of the cathedral, and at first were too cautious to enter the building. Eventually, one

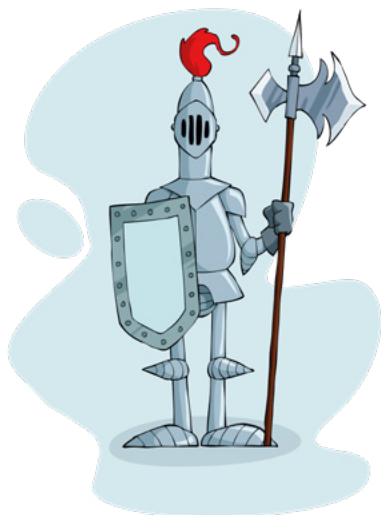
of them gathered the courage to go inside and cause mischief. He smashed tables and chairs, tripped the Lord Bishop, and then tried to play tricks on the choir. The choirs were singing so beautifully- despite the imp's best efforts to distract them- that an angel appeared and ordered the imp to stop. Forgetting that he was acting alone, the imp shouted "Stop me if you can!" and the angel met his command. Pointing a finger at the imp, the angel turned him to pure stone, where he still sits to this very day in a dark corner of the cathedral's beautiful interior.

The legend has been told and retold many times, but a popular variation suggests that the second imp ran from Lincoln to the nearby town of Grimsby and into St. James' Church, repeating his companion's behaviour and being served a more severe punishment by the same angel; a thrashing on his backside for not learning a lesson, and then being turned to stone himself. This imp can also still be seen inside the church, frozen in stone, clutching at his sore bottom and feeling sorry for himself.

Despite its negative associations, the imp has become a welcome symbol for the city of Lincoln. The local football team, who play in the third tier of English football, are even nicknamed 'The Imps' and their badge features a horrifying illustration of the devil's minion.

GUY OF WARWICK

The story of a warrior named Guy of Warwick first appeared around the 13th century and it begins with a low-born cupbearer from the county of Warwickshire, who at the first glance of the Earl of Warwick's daughter knew that he was in love. The girl's name was Felice, and because she was high-born, Guy was aware that his chances of being granted permission to win her hand would be slim. Therefore, he decided to become a knight in order to convince the Earl of Warwick that he was a worthy suitor.



Guy spent years travelling Europe, training to fight as a respected knight, and earning a social status high enough to win Felice's hand in marriage. He slayed a wild boar near the town of Coventry, a giant creature known as the Dun Cow and even a dragon. He also carried out many other heroic deeds to prove himself a worthy knight, but which, ultimately, he was not that proud of.

Upon his return to Warwick, Felice gladly agreed to marry Guy, and they lived happily together, but only for a short time. As Guy settled into a new, quieter lifestyle with his new wife, free time allowed the guilt of his past actions to creep in and cast a shadow over his happiness. Wanting to right his wrongs and seek forgiveness, Guy disguised himself and made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, promising Felice that he would return soon, and they would be happy once more. Felice was distraught, and if not for carrying their unborn child, would have surely caused herself harm.

Returning from his pilgrimage, Guy caught word that the Danes were planning a full-scale invasion of the country, an

invasion which King Athelstan wanted to avoid at all costs after years of death and torment from the Vikings. The Danes agreed with King Athelstan that a two-man fight could settle matters. The Danes believed that nobody could beat their champion, Colbrond, but unbeknownst to them, the king had dreamt of an anonymous pilgrim winning the duel. This pilgrim turned out to be none other than Guy; the only person who could prevent the Vikings from causing any more harm. Guy won the duel, and the Danes were true to their word and returned home empty-handed. Still full of remorse even after his pilgrimage, it was clear to Guy that there was no end in sight to such a violent lifestyle, and he felt that the only way to avoid being witness to any more death was to disappear completely and live alone as a hermit. Avoiding people for such a length of time took its toll on Guy; he grew ill and weary in a wooden hut somewhere near Warwick. Unfortunately, he was never able to face resuming his relationship with the love of his life, Felice. On his deathbed, he sent word of his whereabouts but also his fatal illness to Felice, and she rushed from Warwick to meet him one last time before his death.

Guy's final resting place is not known, and of course there are many who claim that he was not a real person, but some of the confusion with regards to his whereabouts lies in an interesting mistake within the English language from over a thousand years ago! It is well documented that Guy isolated himself beside the River Avon, but bizarrely there are five rivers called "Avon" in Britain. The reason there are so many is that when the Anglo-Saxons first landed in Britain they had a system of naming rivers, but the Celts, who also lived in Britain, did not name rivers at all. When the Anglo-Saxons tried to learn about the land, they asked the Celts about the names of different rivers around the country, to which the Celts simply replied "Avon." In Celtic, the word "Avon" literally translates to "river," and because of a large-scale miscommunication over hundreds of years, the people of Britain were calling lots of different stretches of water "River Avon" without realising they were not actually using river names, but simply echoing the word "river" in two different languages! All that is known about Guy's whereabouts is that it is near to River Avon; which particular River Avon and which stretch of that river, however, remains a mystery.

JACK O' LANTERN

Every October before Halloween, people all over the world decorate their windows and doorsteps with carved pumpkins called Jack O'Lanterns. Pumpkins have become a symbol of the holiday and it is now hard to imagine Halloween without the round, orange fruit (contrary to popular belief, pumpkin is not a vegetable). It may be interesting, however, to know that the Jack O'Lantern has deep historical roots and originally did not even involve a pumpkin. In fact, the tradition comes from an old Irish legend about a man named Stingy Jack, the Devil, and a turnip!

According to the legend, Stingy Jack was an old drunk who liked playing tricks on other people and even



the Devil himself. One day Jack invited the Devil to join him for a drink. True to his name, Stingy Jack didn't want to spend his money, so he convinced the Devil to turn himself into a coin that Jack could use to pay for the drinks. The Devil did so but Jack decided to keep the money and put it into his pocket next to a silver cross, which stopped the Devil from changing back into his original form. Jack eventually freed the Devil, but he made him promise that he would not seek revenge for a year and that he would not take Jack's soul after his death.

A year passed and the Devil returned. And then Jack played another trick on him. He talked him into climbing a tree to pick an apple. While the Devil was up in the tree, Jack carved a cross on the tree's bark. Unable to touch it, the Devil was stuck in the tree until he promised Jack not to bother him for another ten years.

When Jack died, as the legend goes, God did not allow the old drunk and sinner to enter heaven. The Devil, upset by the tricks Jack had played on him, did not let him enter hell, either. Jack was stuck between heaven and hell with nowhere to go. The Devil gave him a parting gift from hell: a piece of burning coal. Jack put the fiery coal into a carved-out turnip, and legend has it that he has been roaming the earth ever since, looking for somewhere to finally rest, lighting his way with the makeshift lantern. When people saw Jack's ghost carrying the lantern, they called him "Jack of the Lantern", and then shortened the name to "Jack O'Lantern".

Making vegetable lanterns was an old tradition in the British Isles, and carved-out turnips, beets, and potatoes were stuffed with coal or candles as lanterns to celebrate the fall harvest and to frighten away Stingy Jack and other evil spirits. Interestingly, pumpkins were not used for this purpose as they were not grown or known in Europe at that time. Immigrants from Ireland and Britain brought the custom to the United States, and soon they discovered that the humble pumpkin was bigger and easier to carve out. From then on, pumpkins replaced other vegetables and became a symbol of Halloween.

DICK WHITTINGTON

When we think about legends and folk tales, animals are often just as important as the human characters. One particular animal that appears in such stories is the cat. And that was the case with the 16th century tale of Dick Whittington in which a feline brought fame and fortune to a penniless young man.

Once upon a time, as the story goes, there was a poor orphan boy called Dick Whittington. He was often hungry, his clothes were ragged and he did not have a place to live. Dick looked for a job, but nobody wanted to hire him. He frequently heard stories about a faraway city called London, where the streets were paved with gold, and everybody was very rich. Thus, he decided to go there and become a rich man.

He walked for many days, but when he arrived in London, it turned out there were no streets of gold! To his disappointment, they were covered with mud and dirt. The desperate lad looked for work once more, but still nobody wanted to help him. Hungry and exhausted, he fell asleep on the steps of a rich merchant's house. He woke up the next morning and heard the voice of a fat cook yelling at him and telling him to get out. When Dick was just about to vacate the doorway as instructed, the owner of the house, Mr. Fitzwarren, looked outside and took

pity on Dick. The boy was given a job cleaning the kitchen and washing pots, and Mr. Fitzwarren allowed him to live in the house provided he worked for his share. Now, Dick had enough to eat and a roof over his head, but the mean cook and pesky mice made his life miserable. The cook bullied him all the time, and the mice were running around his attic room, keeping Dick awake at night. He was desperate to make his life a little better so when he saved some money, he bought a cat. The puss turned out to be extremely good at catching mice and soon there were no more of them in the house. At last, Dick could sleep!



Not long after, Mr. Fitzwarren announced to his servants that he had fallen on hard times, and he was going on a long voyage with hopes of selling his wares and making some money. He told them that the only way he could guarantee their job security was to gather all of his belongings for selling, and he asked them if they also had anything that he could sell on his travels. The only thing of value which Dick had was his cat. He hated to part with the animal because he had grown fond of it, and he knew he would be disturbed by mice again, but it was only fair to return the favour to Mr. Fitzwarren.

When the merchant was at sea, the mice and the cook made Dick's life miserable again. Unaware of how long Mr. Fitzwarren would be gone, and unable to cope with their bullying any longer, he decided to run away. He packed his few belongings and set out early in the morning. After a while, he sat down to rest and think, and then he heard church bells that seemed to sound like "Turn again, Whittington. Thrice Lord Mayor of London".

Dick was puzzled by the mysterious sounds but decided to go back to London and investigate. Upon his coming back to London, Dick noticed that Mr. Fitzwarren had returned from his voyage. He had indeed sold the cat to a foreign king who was so in love with the animal that he paid a real fortune for it. The merchant was a fair and honest man and handed over all the profit that he had earned from the cat to Dick. And so, Dick Whittington became a rich man. When he washed his face and put on some nice clothes, he turned out to be a very handsome lad, and soon he married the merchant's daughter. Over the years, Dick worked hard and used the money wisely to multiply his fortune. He became so wealthy that he lent money to the king! And, as the bells had promised, Dick Whittington was indeed elected Lord Mayor of London three times. His story lives on in one of England's most timeless and well-known folk tales.

Interestingly, the story is based on the life of Richard Whittington who was a real person and lived from about 1350 to 1423. He was brought up in a relatively wealthy family in Gloucestershire and went to London to find a job. Richard became a rich cloth merchant and was mayor of London three times.

LADY GODIVA

Godiva, or Godgifu in Old English, was an 11th century noblewoman who was married to the powerful Earl of Mercia and Lord of Coventry, Leofric. Of all the stories, myths and tales of the British Isles, that of Lady Godiva is the most widely documented and therefore most likely to have the truest origins.

Coventry is a city in the West Midlands, which at that time was in the Kingdom of Mercia and under the rule of Leofric. He was regarded as a stern but generous man, and it is well known that he helped his beautiful wife Godiva found chapels and monasteries in the local area. One of his moves which was not so popular was the heavy taxation which he imposed on the people of Coventry. With Godiva's generous nature, she often convened with locals to hear their stories and listen to their troubles, and they would politely tell her that the enormous tax increases were putting such a crippling strain on their day-to-day lives that many of them were unable to put food on their table.

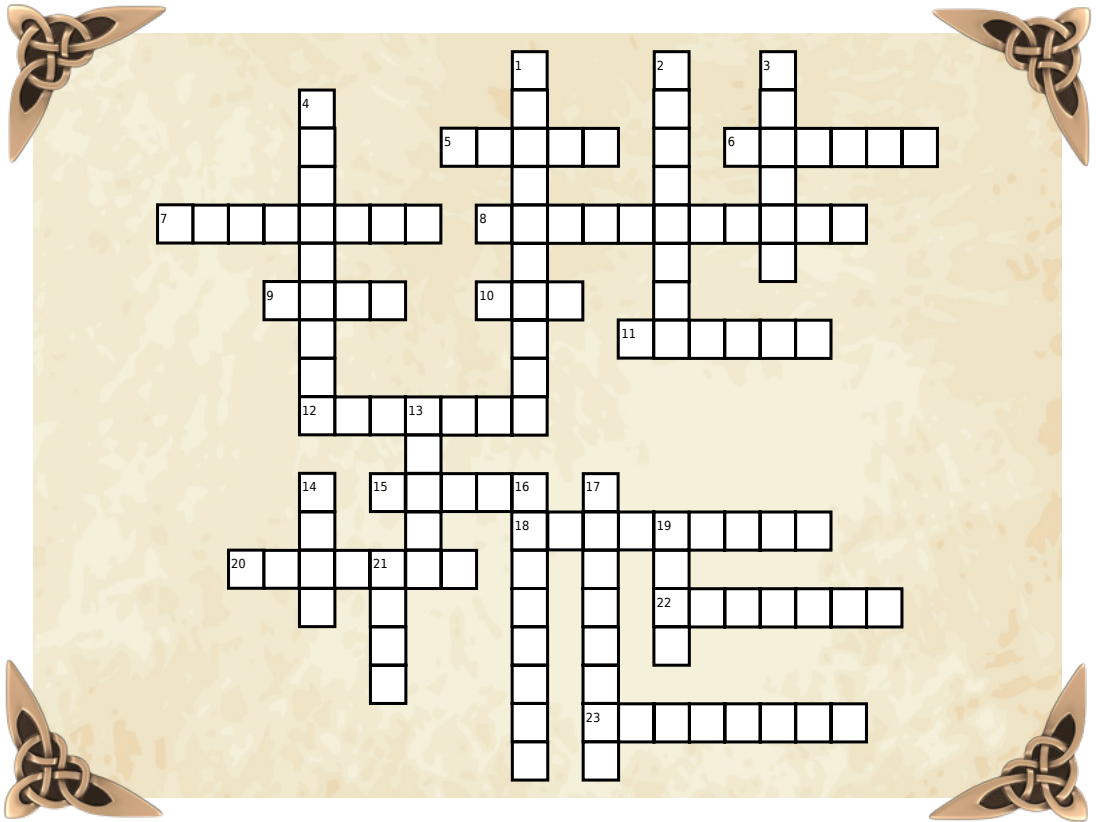


As the story goes, Godiva, unhappy with how the new taxation changes were received, wanted to ease the financial burden on her husband's people. She pleaded and begged him to lower taxes, and after some time he finally agreed, on one condition: reversing a recent law change was one of the most undignifying things a powerful man like Leofric could do, so in return she must also strip away her dignity - and her clothes - and ride naked on horseback through the city of Coventry. Leofric argued that if she was really a woman of the people, and if the people of Coventry were truly troubled by taxes, then they would respect Godiva's plan enough to board their windows and not lay eyes on her.

Godiva spread word of her deed and surely enough, on the morning of her ride, there was not a single person to be seen in the city, and not a single window which was unboarded. She removed all of her clothes and rode through town. Leofric had expected lots of people to be sneaking around and taking a look at his undressed wife, but he was amazed that with the promise of lower taxes, they complied with Godiva's wishes. And, as agreed, Leofric reduced the tax burden on the people of Coventry.

There was, however, one man named Thomas who could not keep his eyes to himself. He was blinded as a punishment for looking at the naked Godiva, and lived the rest of his days as a beggar. If you ever hear the words 'peeping Tom' to describe somebody who is looking at something they shouldn't be looking at, now you know where the phrase comes from!

CROSSWORD



Down:

1. A pilgrim's journey
2. Without shoes
3. The name of the wise magician who advised King Arthur
4. The nickname of King Richard who was Robin Hood's contemporary
13. A person who is the legal property of another and is forced to work for them
14. The plural form of 'mouse'
16. A class of animals that includes snakes, lizards, and crocodiles
17. Of or from Scotland
19. The Scottish word for 'lake'
21. A knee-length skirt traditionally worn by men in Scottish Highlands

Across:

5. St. David was born there
6. The beast on the Welsh flag
7. Lady Godiva's city
8. A form of execution in which a person was nailed to a cross
9. St. David's favourite vegetable
10. The legendary little monster from Lincoln
11. Mean and ungenerous, like Jack O'Lantern
12. Scotland's national emblem
15. The head of a town
18. The sword that only the legitimate heir to the throne of England could pull out
20. A type of hat worn by Robin Hood
22. King Arthur's castle
23. Ireland's most recognizable symbol

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