



A Salisbury-Cathedral-centric view of History.

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CONNECTIONS

Celia Fiennes was discussed in J&T 125 and 128. A recent acquisition is *Pop Goes the Weasel* by Albert Jack (Penguin 2010). Albert seems to have taken over from the Opies in exploring the secret meanings of nursery rhymes. Under *Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross* he states that it is nothing to do with Lady Godiva - who incidentally was highly unlikely to have ridden naked - and was appropriated by Celia's family at Broughton Castle who thought that *to see a fine lady* should really be *see a Fiennes lady!!!*

The most likely origin though refers to Queen Elizabeth I who travelled through Banbury on one of her progresses. Her carriage lost a wheel at the bottom of a steep hill but luckily a *cock horse* was available. Cock horses were stallions that were kept by a town to assist carts laden with goods up steep hills. A darker possibility is that the rhyme refers to puritanical hardliners who destroyed the medieval crosses and thought the Catholic church the Whore of Babylon (*rings on her fingers and bells on her toes*). Even today the Banbury football team are called *The Puritans*.



Bobby Shafto is firmly based in Durham and refers to their philandering MP Robert Shafto in 1760 - who in 1768 moved south, becoming MP for our Downton.



Little Jack Horner was the steward of the Abbot of Glastonbury who sent him to Hampton Court with the deeds of twelve manor houses hidden beneath a pie crust, hoping to save the destruction of the abbey. The wily Jack however removed the 'plum' estate of Mells near Frome for himself and then became one of the jurors who pronounced the abbot guilty of treason, leading to his grisly death.

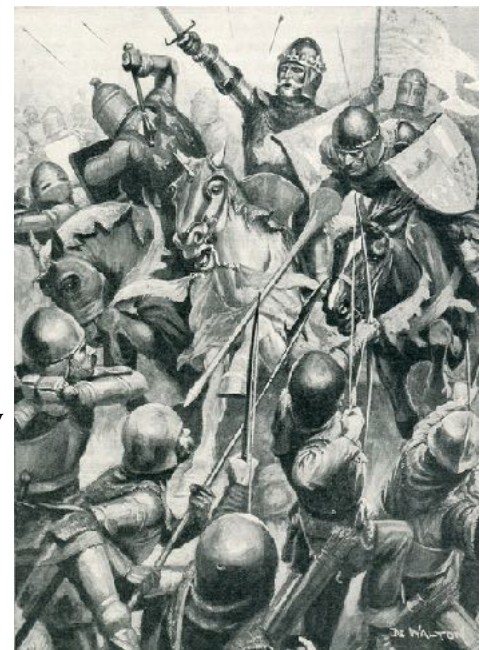
The descendants of Jack Horner, still live at Mells Manor but naturally deny the story. The family are Asquiths and therefore related to the Bonham-Carters - Lady Violet is buried in the Parish Church of St Andrew, as are others (left). Sassoon lived at Fitz House, Teffont Magna and later at Heytesbury House, now the residence of Lord Heytesbury (the Holmes-à Court family). Incidentally, Heytesbury was at one time the home of Empress Maude (Matilda) who lived from 1102 to 1167.

In J&T 121 we discussed Court Cards. Having watched a dvd of one of our favourite ballets, *Alice in Wonderland*, I picked up Jack's book and under *The Queen of Hearts* found that the original Queen of Hearts playing card was introduced from France in 1650 and was apparently inspired by the Bible's Judith who cut off the head of the Assyrian general Holofernes. Hence Carroll's queen repeating the mantra *off with his head*.

HIS-STORIES

Robert Lacey's book *Great Tales from English History* (Little, Brown 2003) is a mine of interesting stories. He presents King John in his usual bad light (*Hell was a foul place, but it would now be rendered still more foul by the presence of King John*) but goes on to state: *But John's painstaking record-keeping has certainly provided us with some interesting insights into his life. The detailed inventory of what he lost in the watery East Anglian wastes included pieces of glass, which seem to have been portable windowpanes ready to be cut and fitted into the castles he visited. John was clearly a man who loved his comforts. We read in his accounts of William his bathman, paid a halfpenny a day for his services, with a few extra pence as a tip when he actually prepared a bath. The record shows us that John was unusually clean for his time - he took a bath every three weeks - while an entry describing 'an over-tunic for when his Lordship the King gets up in the night' reveals a further claim to distinction. John was England's first king to be recorded as owning a dressing-gown.*

Writing about Edward III's victory of Crécy in the Hundred Years War, he notes that the English were forbidden tennis, dice, cock-fighting and various forms of ball games as they were a diversion from archery practice. The French on the other hand prohibited peasants from possessing any arms at all. The heralds identified more than fifteen hundred slain lords, amongst which was John, the blind King of Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic) and son of the Holy Roman Emperor. He was a great soldier and lost his sight whilst fighting in Lithuania as part of the *Northern Crusade*. His body was tied to two of his nobles 'so that I may strike one stroke with my sword' (see right). The Bohemian king's crest was brought from the battlefield and adopted by the Black Prince - three white feathers and the motto *Ich Dien*, I serve, which of course are both still in use by the monarch's eldest son.





Whilst besieging Calais, Edward III held a grand ball to celebrate his victory where his eye was taken by the nineteen year old Joan, the *Fair Maid of Kent*. I am sure you know the story of her losing her garter which was picked up and worn by the king and which provided the narrative around which developed the Order of the Garter. Joan ended up marrying the Black Prince but what you might not know is that at the time of the dance she was bigamously married to both Sir Thomas Holland and our Earl of Salisbury - *Honi soit qui mal y pense*.

Left, Joan of Kent from one of the Cotton manuscripts *courtesy of the British Library and in the Public Domain*.

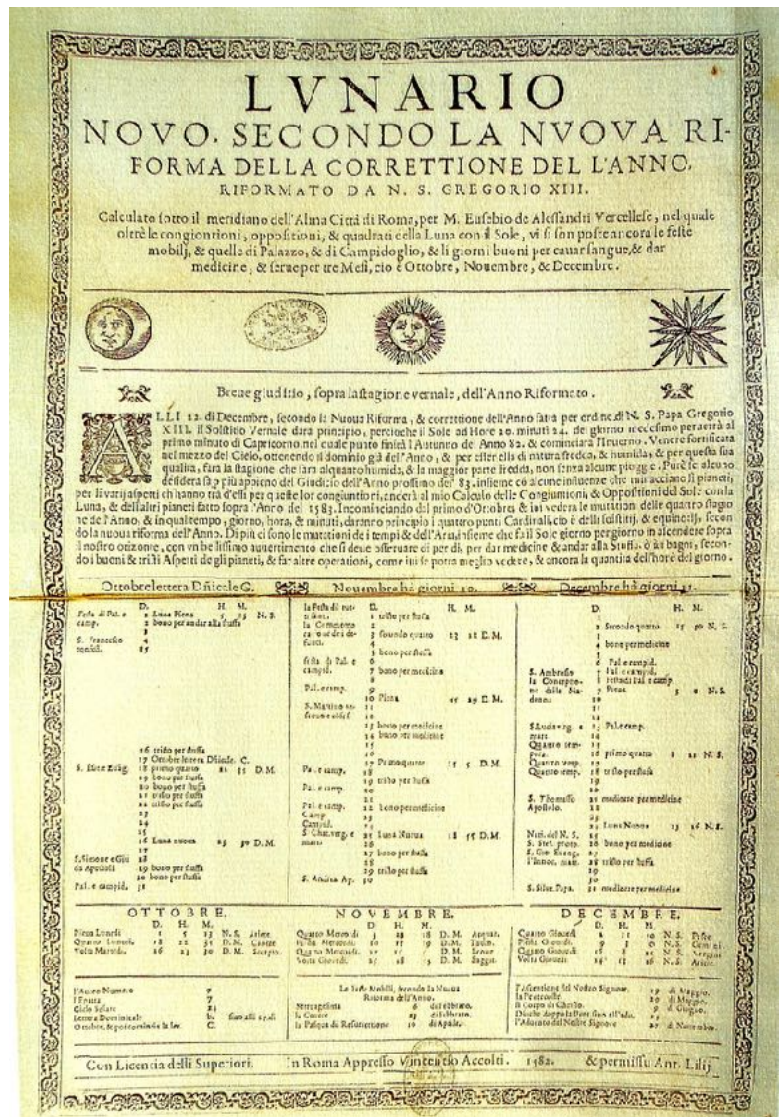
THE NEW YEAR

In Neolithic times, Egypt managed to calculate the length of a year pretty accurately. This is in part due to the Nile which flooded regularly each year and could be measured on a Nilometer (a simple height ruler). They also noted that Sirius, the Dog Star and the brightest in the sky, ascends in the dawn sky once a year in a direct line with the rising sun. also that this event coincided with the annual flood. The shadows cast by the pyramids were also measured and used to mark the equinoxes. Adding a quarter day to the calendar was revolutionary and brought the accuracy to within 11 minutes and 24 seconds of the true solar year.

The priests, like the Catholic church centuries later, refused to accept this innovation. It was only when Rome conquered Egypt that they were forced to accept the Julian calendar which was in fact not as accurate as the neolithic version. A similar situation pertained when the Spanish conquered Central America and forced the ancient civilisations of the Maya and Aztecs to accept the less accurate Julian calendar.

Whilst we can take our hat off to the ancient Egyptians, we should not forget that in Wiltshire, we too had an accurate measurement - courtesy of Stonehenge.

The Roman and Byzantine empires employed a taxation system called the *Indiction* that started on September 1st which then gave rise to the liturgical year. The Romans fixed on January 1st from 153BC and confirmed it with the Julian calendar. During the Dark Ages we lost the Roman influence but it was brought back by the Church and became official under William the Conqueror. However, around 1155 we joined the rest of Europe using March 25th (Lady Day) as the New Year which lasted until 1752! Although the



Gregorian calendar came out in 1582 there was no way that the English Protestant clergy would accept a Pope's dictum. The Gregorian calendar shown on page 3 was printed in Rome in 1582 by Vincenzo Accolti and is in the Public Domain.



Samhain was the Celtic/Gaelic winter festival and may have been equivalent to New Year. Mumming, guising and divination are parts of the celebrations we have inherited regionally. The Church tried to put a Christian gloss on the Celtic and Viking influenced New Year by naming it the feast of Christ's Circumcision. This attempt to rid New Year of its pagan origins are in part why the New Year was moved to March. Though this did not stop aristocrats exchanging presents on January 1st.

Above, *Snap Apple*, a divination game, painted by Daniel Maclise (1833) and in the Public Domain.

Apparently 45% of Americans make New Year resolutions an idea which goes back to the Babylonians, feast of *Akitu*, 4000 years ago. A 2007 study by the University of Bristol found that 88% of those making resolutions failed to keep them. In medieval times, knights took the *Peacock Vow* to re-affirm their commitment to chivalry. *The Banquet du Paon* (below) comes from *The Romance of Alexander the Great* by an anonymous 15th century painter. In the Public Domain.

I am indebted to *The Calendar* by David Ewing Duncan (Fourth Estate 1998), *Life in the Middle Ages* by Martyn Whittock (Constable & Robinson 2009), *The Time Travellers Guide to Medieval England* by Ian Mortimer (Vintage 2009) and Wikipedia.

REMINISCENCES

Leslie Thomas recalls that his first friend on moving to the Close was Manxman Canon John Kerruish. The delight of his life



was his Oxford College - Magdalen. *He knew every footnote of its history, who had been there and when. each week he would make a one day pilgrimage by rail, dining at the High Table, and returning by the last train of the day. The Salisbury Station staff knew him well and after he had alighted, with a beaming face and sometimes with difficulty, onto the platform they knew they could shut up for the night....*

Dying clergy in the past had sometimes, when they could rise to it, sung for the final time as they passed away but John Kerruish bettered this. When he died in Salisbury Hospital he had the choir from his beloved Magdalen College ranged about his bed, hymning him into Heaven.

Thomas also recalled that the previous tenant of the Walton Canonry had ten beautiful daughters every one of which was musical. He found a whole cupboard of violins and a discarded organ in the cellar. *The alluring daughters had been known to wade into the river, wearing airy nighties, flinging tidbits to the enchanted swans while singing pretty songs or reciting Shakespeare. When their father, a Peer, returned to Salisbury Station after a hard day debating in the House of Lords, two of the children would take a dinghy up river and his lordship would clamber over the gunwale to journey home in style.*



Almost Heaven by Leslie Thomas (Bene Factum 2010). Photo of Family room in the canonry named after Izaak Walton's son Isaac.

JANUARY



The first month of the year is named after the Roman god Janus who had quite a wide job-spec: *beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, frames and endings*. A building in Rome which was an open enclosure with gates; these gates were open in times of war and closed when peace was resumed. For once he did not come from the Greek pantheon but was probably descended from the Etruscan god *Culsans*. He is traditionally shown as facing two ways as in the *Janus Bifrons* (left), a marble double herm *courtesy of the Vatican Museum. Creative Commons Attribution.*

As mentioned above, the first of January was adopted by both Eastern and Western churches as the date when Christ was circumcised and named. This follows Jewish (and Samaritan) tradition which holds that males should be circumcised eight days after birth during a *Brit milah* ceremony. This practice was discouraged by St Paul despite him talking at length about his own circumcision. St Luke's gospel only gives a very brief account. It was also seen as the first time Christ bled.

In medieval times there were a number of relics purporting to be of Christ's foreskin, the best known being in the Lateran Basilica. It was looted in the sack of Rome but recovered. The *Prepuce of Calcata* in its reliquary (right) was paraded through this Italian village as late as 1983 - until thieves stole it, from a shoebox under the priest's bed!



HAPPY NEW YEAR