



A personal selection of Salisbury, Wiltshire, Wessex, British and world, history

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SEEKING TRUTH

As someone who is interested in History I am sure you, like me, have come to mistrust political shibboleths. Tim Harford's Radio 4 programme *More or Less* has done the nation a real service by questioning the 'facts and figures' given by politicians. Bearing this in mind, what are we to make of the Ukrainian, Russian, Israeli and Palestinian claims to sovereignty?

As I did not really know the background to these present-day conflicts I thought I would do some research. One thing to remember is that we are an island which gives us a feeling of security denied to most countries. This explains why other nations often go for autocratic leaders, Russia being a good example.

UKRAINE

The map on the right is of Kievan Rus at its height, largely established by Varangian nobleman Oleh the Wise around 880

AD. The Varangians were 8th and 9th century Viking settlers and traders in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. There was of course no real Russia at this point, just various ethnic groups moving westward out of Asia. The Varangians also formed the Byzantine Emperor's fierce *Varangian Guard* (but more of that another time). The people of the region were largely of Slav origin (a part of the multi-ethnic confederacies of Eurasia).

Kyiv prospered and gradually became Christianised until internal conflict and the Mongol invasion brought this period to an end. The Black Sea coast was dominated by the Genoans but the majority of the country passed to the Lithuanians and Poles who fought off the Mongols in the 14th century. Lithuanian rulers added the title *Ruler of Rus* and Polish leaders, *Lord and Heir of Ruthenia* (Eastern Slavs). Poland oppressed the Ukrainians which led to a number of rebellions. The Golden Horde occupied the Black Sea coast and southern steppes of the Ukraine where they sold some two million of the inhabitants into slavery.

The Union of Lublin in 1569 saw the birth of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with Kiev coming under Polish domination. Polish peasants arrived in great numbers and mixed with the local peasantry. However the nobles became *Polonised* and Catholic whilst the Ruthenians were





Orthodox resulting in tensions, especially when they were forced into serfdom. Those serfs who escaped came to be known as Cossacks. The nobles refused to accommodate the Cossacks who began to undermine the Commonwealth. In order to protect themselves the Poles and Lithuanians sought a treaty protection with Russia in 1654. The Cossack Hetmanate (the precursor of modern Ukraine) fought not only the Poles but the Ottoman Turks in the south and the Tsardom of Russia or Muscovy (founded in 1547) in the east.

The painting below by Ilya Jefimowitsch Repin (1844 - 1930) is entitled *The reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* and lies in a Russian museum and is in the Public Domain. The 'reply' was in answer to Sultan Mehmed's insistence that the Cossacks should submit to his authority. Then came the *Pereiaslav Agreement* signed in

1654 in which the Cossacks accepted the protection of the Tsardom in exchange for allegiance. The exact nature of this agreement is subject to scholarly controversy.

In subsequent decades Tsarist rule replaced protection except in the west (Galicia) where following the partitions of Poland in 1772, it came under the Austrians. The Ottoman control in the south receded whilst the Transcarpathian region came under Hungary. The rise of nationalistic spirit in Europe made the Hungarians determined to revive the Ukrainian linguistic and cultural traditions, *Ukrainophilia*. The Russians reacted by banning its use and study in the nineteenth century. This resulted in many intellectuals moving to Western Ukraine. With the start of WW1 the Austrians placed those supporting Russia in a concentration camp, where many died.

The revolutions in Europe of 1848 (*The Springtime of The Peoples*) saw the establishment of a Supreme Ruthenian Council, demanding independence, and they produced the first Ukrainian language newspaper. The Russian 1861 *emancipation* helped as 42% of Ukrainians were serfs.

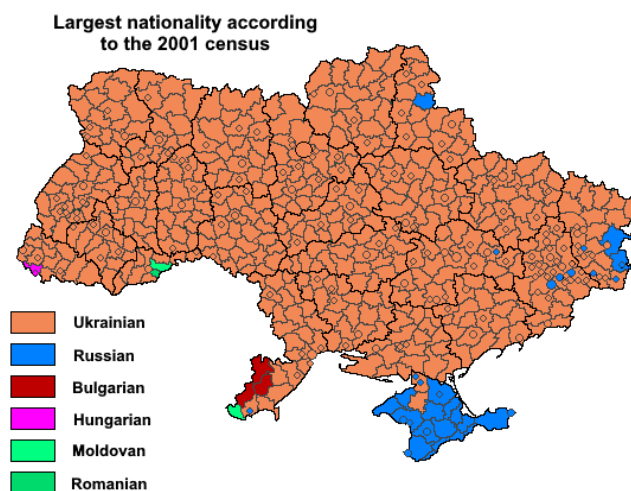


Although the peasantry were impoverished, the steppe regions produced 20% of the world's wheat and 80% of the empire's sugar. Under the Soviets some 5 million souls perished from starvation which some believe was deliberate genocide. It affects the country even now. Known as the *Holodomor* which literally means death by hunger. The Axis armies occupied Ukraine from 1941 to 1944 followed by the Russians. Nikita Krushchev was head of the Ukraine Communist Party and when he became Russian leader it led to more political and cultural freedom and in 1954 the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine.

Ukraine gained independence when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. In November 2013 President Viktor Yanukovich suspended talks with the EU and sought closer ties with Russia, as a result of which he was impeached. The Russo-Ukrainian war began in 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea.

There has been a very large Jewish population since the Kievan Rus but horrific pogroms have taken place in the last two centuries, culminating in the Holocaust when at least 1.2 million died. Although the Russians have been blamed for many of the massacres, there is a real anti-Semitic problem in Ukraine, even today. Most Jews have now escaped to Israel - out of the frying pan...

What we are dealing with here is a country with an unfortunate mix of ethnicity and language. There has not been a census since 2001 when 67.5% of the population said they were Ukrainian and 29.6% said Russian. There are minor ethnic groups of Crimean Tatars 0.5%, Bulgarians 0.4%, Hungarians 0.3%, Jews 0.2% and Roma 0.1%. When it comes to language 85.2% of Ukrainians spoke that language and 14.8% spoke Russian. Among the ethnic Russians 95.9% spoke Russian and 3.9% spoke Ukrainian. The Donbas region and Crimea has the highest percentage of Russians.



Imagine Scotland wishing to leave the Union when there are 460,000 other Brits living in Scotland and 836,000 Scots living in the rest of Britain. However the geographical split shows that there is at least a possibility for peaceful compromise.

ISRAEL

The Romans got fed up with the Israelites and their revolts and destroyed the Temple and most of Jerusalem. They then renamed the province Syria-Palaestina so it was not seen as a Jewish homeland. Most of the Jewish population moved either to Galilee or fled abroad. Christianity gradually separated from Judaism in this period and became a Gentile religion.

Mark Twain visited Palestine in 1867 and wrote *a desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds - a silent mournful expanse...A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action....We never saw a human being on the whole route....There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.* It had been like that for centuries with just Arab nomads who preyed on the peasant *fellahin* as population. As Lord Shaftesbury put it in 1875 *a country without a people, and look! scattered over the world, a people without a country.*

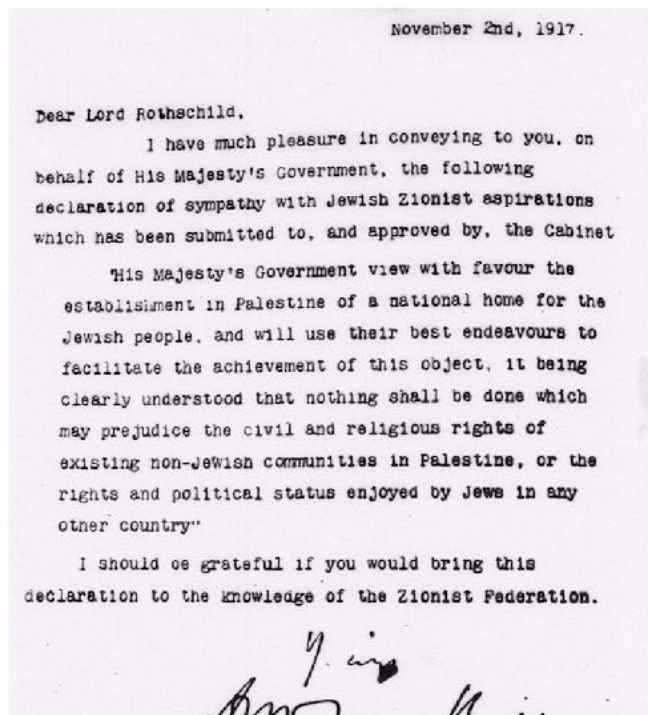
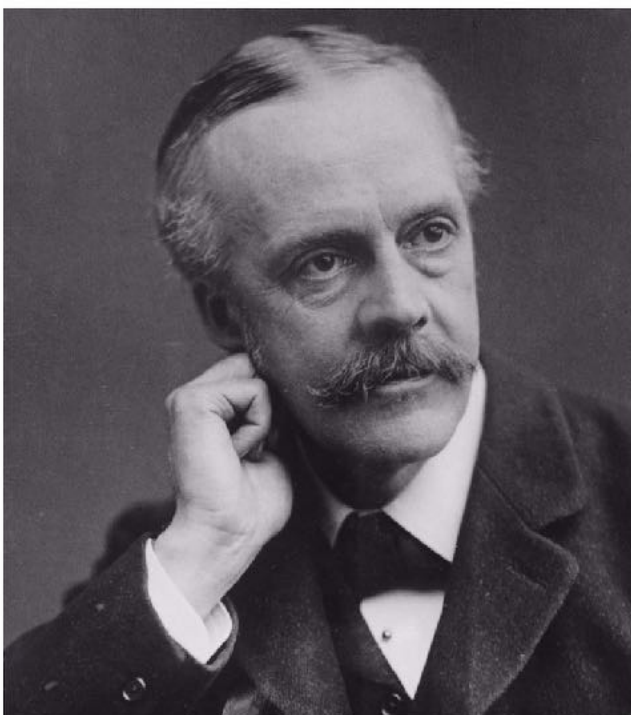
At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Zionist group *Hovevei Zion* set up a series of Jewish settlements in the 'Land of Israel', financed by Baron Edmond James de Rothschild and where Hebrew is revived as a modern language. In 1890 the term Zionism is coined by an

Austrian Jewish publicist, Nathan Birbaum. In 1897 Theodore Herzl writes *Der Judenstaat* following the Dreyfus Affair and the first Zionist Congress is held at Basel. Tel Aviv is founded in 1909 and Ben-Yehuda's first Hebrew Dictionary is published. By 1913 the population was 600,000 Arabs and 94,000 Jews.

During WWI there was a thought, by such luminaries as Chaim Weizmann and Sir Herbert Samuel, that their homeland could be secure under a British Trusteeship. Incidentally, a Zion Mule Corps was set up in 1915 and served in Gallipoli whilst in 1917 the 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, composed of East End Jews, was sent to Palestine. The 39th Battalion comprised US Jews but arrived in Palestine too late to take part.

In 1917 the British defeat the Turks and gain control of Palestine. The British issue the Balfour Declaration which gave official support to *the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people*. The 1920 san Remo conference gives Britain the League of Nations mandate of Palestine. Britain of course has ties with the Arabs (TE Lawrence) and puts a halt on Jewish immigration but not on Arab immigration. Note the careful wording of Balfour's letter to Lord Rothschild. The foreign Office foresaw trouble between the two ethnic groups and tried to ease the position but it was unstoppable. I wonder too, if Britain and the US, had it in the back of their minds that with no Israel, their own countries would become swamped with Jewish immigrants?

200,000 Jews arrive in Israel in 1929 as a result of the Nazi rise to power. There are riots over the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem in the same year and Jews are killed as tension rises. 1936 sees



the Arab Revolt against British Rule, demanding Arab independence and the end to Jewish migration. In 1939 a British White Paper proposes a limit of 10,000 Jews a year plus 250,000 refugees for any emergency. In 1941 the Muslim residents of Baghdad murder some 200 Jews and wound thousands of others. The Haganah (founded 1920) create the Palmach (below), an elite force to protect local Jewish communities.

Jewish defence groups Haganah, Irgun and Lehi attack British troops. The UN votes on a partition plan in 1947 which the Zionists accept but the Arabs reject. In May 1948, minutes before the British Mandate expired, the State of Israel is formed under David Ben-Gurion and is recognised by the US and Russia and eventually the UN. Under *Operation Magic Carpet* tens of thousands of Yemenite Jews are resettled in Israel, driven there by persecution.



The Arab countries of Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon and Egypt launch an attack but are repulsed. Up to a million Jews living in Arab countries flee or are expelled. Later some 250,000 Holocaust survivors

make their way to Israel. Nasser replaces the UN troops with his own and closes the Tiran straits to Israeli shipping. The six-day war is stopped in its tracks when Israel carries out pre-emptive strikes on Egypt, Jordan and Syria. As a result they capture the Sinai peninsula, the Golan Heights and the West Bank.

1962 Israel's nuclear reactor at Dimona comes into operation. 1964 PLO Founded. 1991, the Soviet Union breaks up resulting in many thousands of Jews fleeing to Israel. I will not depress you by going any further as I am sure you can see how intractable the problem has already become. The fact that the neighbouring Arab countries don't want the destabilising Palestinians on their soil means that we are talking about two peoples trying to fit into one small country. Add into the mix the Arabs being divided into *Sunni* and *Shia*, and the machinations of Iran.....

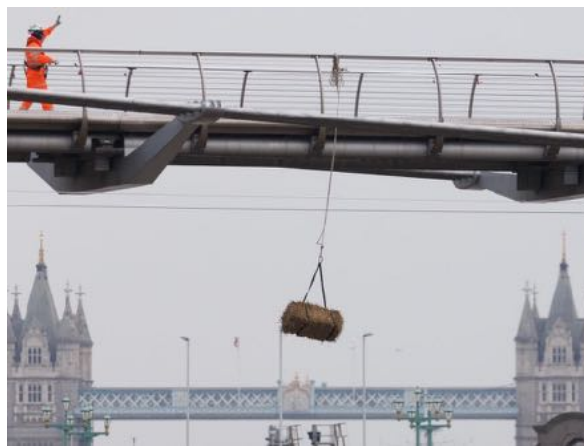
You can of course argue that Israel should never have been founded but you can thank the Nazis and the Soviets for that. Anyway, they are there and it is History that put them there. There is an irony in the fact that what brought in the large Arab population in the first place (it increased 120% between 1922 and 1947) was the increased standard of living created by the new Jewish community. Also, when you look at it, Russia is behind both problems! I don't pretend to know the answer. I am indebted to Wikipedia for much of the above.

CHAPTER MINUTES

In the November 1929 Great Chapter the following minute appears: *Proposal to remove Hertford Monument and replace the altar of St. Stephen abandoned as impractical.* Followed by: Anglo-Catholic Pilgrimage Association wants to make a ceremonial visit to the Cathedral. The Dean states that *as there was a division of opinion he hopes no formal application would be made.* The Chancellor wants to invite them but the Bishop is decidedly against. In the December: Following a successful demonstration, a detailed estimate for supplying a *Hoover cleaning apparatus and fixing plugs etc. be obtained.* January 1930: the Cathedral roof is damaged by storm. Close trees and walls also affected.

THE LAST STRAW

Straw dangling from the Millennium Bridge in October (Dan Kitwood/Getty). If you're carrying out works on a river bridge in London, you have to warn boats by hanging a bale of straw over the side. The 900-year-old City Bridge Foundation, the charity responsible for looking after London's river crossings, says the longstanding practice is demanded by Port of London Thames Byelaws. Clause 36.2 requires that during maintenance work, the person responsible must suspend "by day a bundle of straw large enough to be conspicuous and by night a white light". (Sky News) *Courtesy of The Knowledge.*



Ed: It is interesting that even national media don't know how to use inverted commas properly, that is double ones for speech and single ones for quotes. Not that anyone worries about such things today.

WOW

Guide, Nick Pritchard, writes in response to the piece on Erasmus (J&T No.131): There is a pleasing palindrome about him, to wit, *Sums are not set as a test on Erasmus*. (Palindrome art below).

