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Opening extract from

# **Book Of Absolutely Useless Lists For Absolutely Every Day Of The Year**

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# 1 January

1651: Charles II (of England) is crowned  
King of Scotland in Scone

## Ten things that get some people hot under the collar (if they're wearing one)

1. The state of schools/roads/antelope/hospitals/prisons/  
swimming pools/dungeons/parks/haircuts/whatever today.\*
2. The 'misspelling' and lack of punctuation in text messages.
3. Unjust wars.
4. Anyone wearing a hood unless they are:
  - (i) Taking a basket of food to their grandmother in the forest, whilst trying to dodge wolves
  - (ii) Living in a monastery
  - (iii) Stealing from the rich to give to the poor, whilst hanging with Little John.
5. Adding apostrophes to words for no apparent reason, and particularly being unaware that it's is short for 'it is'.
6. People who say that they don't want their own chips, then end up eating far too many of yours.\*\*
7. People who 'borrow' your clothes without remembering to ask, then return them without remembering to tell you about the nail-varnish/hot-chilli-sauce stain they got on them.
8. People who abuse animals.
9. People who let their animals abuse you – biting/drooling/snarling/far worse – and choose not to notice.
10. Whether 'scone' should be pronounced *skon* (to rhyme with Don) or *skown* (to rhyme with phone).

\* Take your pick.

\*\* This also applies to kebabs and just about everything else, come to think of it.

## 3 January

*1888: the first paper drinking straw is patented, in the USA, by Marvin C. Stone of Washington, DC*

### Some facts about burping

- On average we – and, yes, that includes you – are thought to burp about fifteen times a day.
- Some are big burps that everyone notices. Some are small ones that we hardly know we're doing. A burp can contain up to 80 ml of gas.
- This gas is air. As well as swallowing food and drink, we swallow air (which contains nitrogen and oxygen).
- The air goes down into the stomach. What goes in must come out. Some of this unwanted gas is forced out of the stomach through the tube which connects the back of the throat to the tummy – the oesophagus – and out of the mouth. This can happen very quickly, almost without warning, and a burp is born.
- Drinking fizzy drinks can greatly increase the likelihood of burping . . . because they contain carbon dioxide: yet more gas.
- The remaining unwanted gas escapes through the bottom. But that's a different story.
- Animals burp too. Cows produce about 50 million tonnes of methane gas every year, accounting for 22% of global emissions.
- It's possible to deliberately burp by swallowing air and forcing it out again.
- Girls' burps are not naturally quieter than boys' burps. It's just that girls may do more to try to stifle the sound and, anyway, boys are more likely to practise making their burps as loud as possible.\*

\* Oh, what a surprise!



## 5 January

*1941: pioneer airwoman Amy Johnson disappears  
after crashing in the Thames estuary*

### Three famous disappearances

#### 1. Roanoke

In 1586 Sir Walter Raleigh founded the first English colony in North America on the island of Roanoke (in what was then Virginia but is now North Carolina). Virginia was named after Queen Elizabeth I of England, the Virgin Queen. The colony's leader was Sir Richard Grenville, who returned to England for supplies. While he was gone, the colonists suffered the consequences of a terrible drought, and worsening relations with the local Native Americans. When Sir Francis Drake turned up at the island after a raid in the Caribbean, he agreed to take them all home to England . . . which is why Sir Richard found the place deserted on his return!\*

Grenville left fifteen crew members on Roanoke to maintain an English presence there, then he too headed back home. On 22 July 1587, a second group of 115 colonists arrived under the leadership of John White. Their plan was to join up with the fifteen people already there. Of fourteen there was no sign.\*\* They found the fifteenth, but only his bones.

Soon two babies were born in the colony. The first of these was White's granddaughter, Virginia Dare, on 18 August 1587, making her the very first European to be born in North America. Once again, relations with the local Native Americans were far from good, and one of the colonists was killed. White decided to return to England for help.

He didn't get back to Roanoke until 1588, to find the place deserted. There wasn't a single member of the colony to be found. The only clue was the word 'Croatoan' (*sic*) carved into a tree. The Croatan were a local Native American tribe. Had the colonists joined them on a nearby island? Perhaps they had been massacred by them? Or by the English settlers' deadly

\* But this isn't the disappearance Roanoke is famous for.

\*\* But this isn't the disappearance Roanoke is famous for either.

flammable and explosive cargo. Perhaps there had been a small explosion or fire in the hold (later extinguished by the sea), or something which the captain mistook for an explosion, so he ordered everyone into the 'safety' of a boat, which then broke free in a storm. The disappearance remains a mystery, and young Arthur Briggs became an orphan.

### **3. Amelia Earhart**

US aviator Amelia Earhart's dream was to be the first woman to fly around the world. In 1928 she had been the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. In 1932 she had been only the second person to fly the Atlantic solo. On 1 June 1937 she and her navigator, Fred Noonan, set off from Miami to begin her attempt at circling the globe. By 29 June they had only 7,000 of the 29,000 miles to go. They landed in Lae, New Guinea, and then prepared for the 2,500-mile flight to Howland Island in the mid-Pacific.

Everyone knew the dangers of this leg of the journey. Earhart herself described Howland Island as 'such a small spot in the Pacific'. She not only had her twin-engine Lockheed Electra stripped to its bare essentials so that she could carry extra fuel, she also arranged for a US Coastguard vessel and three other US ships to be positioned along the way as 'route markers'.

On 2 July Earhart and Noonan took off from Lae at 12.30 a.m. The weather forecast was good, but the skies soon became overcast and it started to rain. Radio contact between the Coastguard ship *Itasca* became patchy. At 7.25 p.m. Earhart reported, 'We must be on you, but cannot see you . . . gas is running low . . .' At 8.45, she reported, 'We are running north and south.' This was her final message. Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan were never seen again.

The US government spent a massive \$4 million and searched over 250,000 square miles of the Pacific before finally calling off the rescue operation on 19 July.

There are many theories about what happened to Earhart and Noonan. The two main conspiracy theories are that they were actually on a spying mission for the US government, trying to find out what the Japanese were up to in the Pacific. According to this theory, the so-called 'search and rescue