

Boyle's law

At a constant temperature a volume of gas is inversely proportional to the pressure. The Anglo-Irish chemist Robert Boyle (1627–91) announced his theory in 1662, which was also discovered independently by a French physician Edme Mariotte fourteen years later. Boyle rejected Aristotle's belief that everything was made up of either earth, fire, wind or water, and instead declared that matter was composed of elemental particles. His work on the properties of gases led to the modern theory of chemical elements. A founding member of the Royal Society, Boyle was also a noted writer; one essay is said to have inspired Jonathan Swift to write *Gulliver's Travels*.

Bradshaw

Train timetable. Engraver and printer George Bradshaw (1801–53) published the first railway guide in 1839 soon after the establishment of Britain's railway network. *Bradshaw's Railway Companion* and its familiar yellow supplement, *Bradshaw's Monthly Railway Guide*, which appeared two years later, were published continuously until 1961. Bradshaw was a devout Quaker whose philanthropic ventures included helping to establish schools for poor children. He was abroad on business when he died of cholera and his remains were buried in the grounds of a cathedral in Christiania, in Norway.

Braggadocio

A cowardly boaster, with 'lofty looks hiding in a humble mind'. The vain and lustful poet Braggadocio appeared in Edmund Spenser's (1552–99) allegorical tale of the court of Gloriana, *The Faerie Queen*. Gloriana was said to be based on

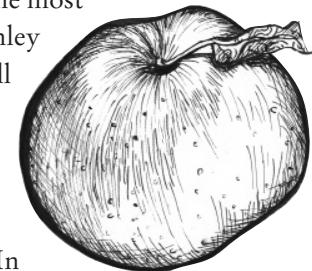
Elizabeth I; Braggadocio was rumoured to be one of her many suitors, François, Duc d'Alençon (1554–84), the son of Henry II of France.

Braille

The written language composed of raised dots that enable the blind to read and write was devised in 1829 by Louis Braille (1809–52). The Parisian educator was himself blinded at the age of three as a result of an accident in his father's harness workshop. Braille refined a similar, more rudimentary system invented by a French army captain, Charles Barbier, which allowed military messages to be read in darkness.

Bramley apple

Green cooking apple that is one of the most popular varieties in Britain. Bramley Seedlings, to give them their full name, first came to the public's attention when they were observed growing in the garden of Matthew Bramley, a butcher at Southwell, Nottinghamshire, in the 1850s. In fact, they had been cultivated as early as 1809 by Mary Ann Brailsford, the previous owner of the cottage and orchard. The original Bramley tree was toppled in a severe storm at the beginning of the twentieth century but a new branch sprouted, which produces apples to this day. Bramleys are tart when eaten raw, but be patient, they sweeten around Easter.



Darwinism

Evolutionary theory proposed by the naturalist Charles Robert Darwin (1809–82). The epic voyage of HMS *Beagle* opened Darwin's eyes to the idea of the survival of the fittest. He was struck by the varieties of species on the Galapagos Islands which did not exist on the mainland and discovered the fossilized remains of creatures which were long since extinct. Darwin's first foray into print was an essay in 1844, the circulation of which was limited to friends and a select number of colleagues. But other scientists were beginning to come to the same conclusions and Darwin hastened the publication of his famous tome, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). The book created an immediate sensation and the survival of the fittest was hotly debated by the scientific community and the Church. Its sequel, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) was no less controversial for linking man and the apes, and its conclusions are still contested by some religious groups today.

Davenport

Large upholstered settee; originally a compact writing desk with a sloped top popular in the eighteenth century. The English firm of Gillow sold the first such model to a Captain Davenport.

Davy Crockett hat

Raccoon-skin cap, complete with tail, supposedly worn by the 'king of the wild frontier'. Crockett (1786–1836) was a Tennessee backwoodsman whose affable style translated well into politics. He was elected to the state legislature in 1821 and later served in the House of Representatives. His ghost-written autobiography



and a number of periodicals exploited his macho image and formed the basis of a successful Walt Disney television programme in the 1950s. Fess Parker's portrayal of the folk hero led to a craze among children for Davy Crockett hats. Crockett's real life adventures ended with Colonel Jim Bowie (see **bowie knife**) at the Alamo, when 200 men defending the besieged Texan mission were massacred by 3,000 Mexican troops.

Davy Jones's locker

Eighteenth-century euphemism for a grave at the bottom of the sea for drowned sailors. Possibly a colloquial version of the biblical story of the devil (Davy), Jonah (Jones) and the whale (the locker). There is also a dubious story of a notorious London innkeeper of the same name whose patrons were drugged and spirited away to any ship in need of extra crew members.

Davy lamp

At the conclusion of his triumphant tour of Europe, the coal-mining industry sought the assistance of the great Cornish chemist Sir Humphrey Davy (1778–1829) to solve the problem of underground explosions. He devised an oil lamp enclosed in wire gauze; the gauze deflected the heat, preventing the flame from igniting the gases outside. A gracious Davy showed magnanimity by refusing to patent his invention. The scientist rose to fame as an exponent of the new discipline of electrochemistry. In 1807,

Golliwog

The black-faced toy, described as ‘a horrid sight’, first appeared in a children’s book, *The Adventures of two Dutch Girls and a ‘Golliwogg’* (1895), by English author Bertha Upton (1849–1912). Both the character and its distinctive shaggy appearance were invented by the book’s illustrator, the author’s US-born daughter Florence K. Upton (1873–1922). Other adventures followed, precipitating a golliwog craze at the turn of the century but Upton neglected to copyright her creation, foregoing the substantial royalties that would have accrued. The decline in the popularity of the toy, now seen as essentially a negative racial stereotype, coincided with the rise of the US civil-rights movement. In Britain the golliwog was officially ‘retired’ from appearing on jars of preserves made by the Manchester firm of James Robertson & Sons in 2002.

Gordian knot

To cut the Gordian knot is to solve a problem by decisive action. Gordias, the mythical founder of the Phrygian capital, tied his chariot to the wall of the citadel and declared that the complicated knot could only be undone by the conqueror of the empire of Asia. Alexander the Great heard the story on entering the city of Gordium in 333 BC and immediately cut the knot with his sword. Gordium was razed by the Cimmerians (who gave their name to the Crimea) in the seventh century BC. A peasant, Gordias, and the Phrygian mother of the gods, Cybele, were the parents of Midas (see **Midas touch**).

Gordon Bennett

Mild expression of displeasure that, like ‘gosh’, neatly avoids invoking the name of the deity. Scottish-born US journalist James Gordon Bennett (1795–1892) was the pre-eminent American newspaperman of the nineteenth century. He founded the *New York Herald* in 1835 and pioneered many modern newsgathering techniques, establishing foreign bureaux and introducing financial reporting. His son and successor of the same name (1841–1918) recognized the commercial potential of sponsorship and attached his name to motor and air races. Without his nose for news we would certainly never have heard the famous expression, ‘Doctor Livingstone, I presume?’ In 1869, Bennett Jnr sent a two-word cable to his reporter Henry Morton Stanley: ‘Find Livingstone.’ He did. The famous meeting took place at Lake Tanganyika in 1871.

Gordon setter

Hunting dog, originally called ‘black and tan setters’, introduced in 1820 by Charles Gordon-Lennox, the 5th Duke of Richmond



M

Macadamia nut

Flavoursome, edible fruit of the evergreen *Macadamia integrifolia* and *Macadamia tetraphylla* trees. Macadamias are native to north-eastern Australia and were developed as a successful crop in Hawaii. John Macadam (1827–65) was the secretary of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria, Australia.

Mach number

Scale measuring the speed of an object or fluid, relative to the speed of sound. At Mach 1 an object is travelling at the speed of sound; Mach 2 is twice the speed of sound, etc. Moravian philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach (1838–1916) carried out major research into thermodynamics that was later to help Albert Einstein develop his theory of relativity. He also held that only science that was observable had any meaning and believed atoms were merely hypothetical.

Machiavellian

Opportunistic, scheming and amoral attitude, especially applied to politicians. Florentine statesman Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) both admired and reviled the actions of his master, the

cunning Cesare Borgia. He took the dispassionate view that his master's terrorism and amorality had brought prosperity and peace to Florence. So when Cesare was deposed, Machiavelli set out the principles and tactics he believed a strong leader should employ for the betterment of the state and society. *The Prince* (1513), his famous treatise to the new ruler, Lorenzo de' Medici, was so naively frank that it was Machiavelli who gained a reputation for unscrupulousness, rather than the politicians who were putting his theories into practice. He was suspected of plotting against the Medici, tortured and dismissed from office. His status was later restored and Machiavelli died in retirement.

Mackintosh

Raincoat. Charles Macintosh was an industrial chemist in Glasgow who invented new dyeing processes and helped



develop bleaching powder before discovering in 1823 the process for waterproofing fabric with rubber. Macintosh patented his discovery and founded a company in Manchester to manufacture the new garments. They did not meet with universal acclaim until vulcanised rubber, which withstood changes in temperature, came on to the market in 1839. Today, the name 'mackintosh' (sic) or 'mack' refers to any modern plastic raincoat.