



A personal selection of Wessex, British Isles and world history.

EDITOR: Mark Brandon

EMAIL: jandthistory@outlook.com

WEBPAGE: jot-and-tittle.com



PUTTING PEN TO PAPER

Pergamum (now western Turkey) had a great library that began to rival Alexandria so pharaoh Ptolemy V cut off the supply of papyrus to them. Eumenes II turned to the old Greek method of using cured sheepskins instead. Pergamene Paper gave us the word *parchment*.



The writing was imprinted using a carbon based ink. This gradually gave way to iron-gall ink. This ink was developed in the 4th century. The *Codex Sinaiticus* (pictured right) is one of the earliest surviving manuscripts to be written on parchment in iron gall rather than carbon based ink. When properly made, iron gall ink is blue-black and permanent. Unlike carbon ink, it etches the writing surface and can't be easily washed off, quickly making it the preferred ink for writing on parchment. It remained in use well into the 20th century whenever permanent ink was necessary.



Iron gall ink is comprised of four main ingredients:



1. Oak galls. Oak galls are a tree's protective reaction to wasps depositing eggs beneath its bark. Once collected, these are then soaked in a solvent.



2. Solvents. Acidic solvents, such as beer or wine, or allowing mould to grow on the gall nuts as they soak help produce gallic acid and increase the colour of the ink.



3. Ferrous sulphate (Green Vitriol). Iron sulphate reacts with gallic acid to produce a blue-black iron-tannin complex.



4. Gum Arabic. Gum Arabic increases viscosity (improves ink flow), keeps pigment particles in suspension, binds ink to the writing surface, and gives the ink shine and depth.



I am grateful to Anish Gupta's article on ink published by the American Philosophical Society. The link with Pergamum came from Barry Cunliffe's *Pytheas the Greek* (Allen Lane, Penguin Press 2001). Parts of the *Codex Sinaiticus* are in the British Library, the Library of the University of Leipzig, the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg, and the Holy Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai (Saint Catherine's). It is one of the most important sources for students of the Christian Bible.



ETYMOLOGY

On reading Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways* (Penguin Books 2013), I came across an interesting paragraph. As one of that small band of philosopher/naturalist walkers, he thinks a lot whilst trekking: The trail begins with our verb *to learn*, meaning to acquire knowledge. Moving backwards in language time, we reach the Old English *leornian*, to get knowledge,

to be cultivated. From *leornian* the path leads into the fricative thickets of Proto-Germanic and to the word *liznojan*, which has a base sense of to follow or to find a track. to learn therefore means at root - at route - to follow a track. I am grateful to the etymologist-explorers who uncovered those lost trails connecting *learning* with *path-following*. Ed: Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* also comes to mind as does Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

SIMPLE IDEAS ARE THE BEST¹



Protestant theologian Jan Amos Komenský, given the Humanist name of *Comenius* (1592 - 1670), was bishop of Sárospatak in today's Hungary where he experimented with new ways to enlist the curiosity of children. In 1658 he published *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (The visible world in pictures). Illustrated with woodcuts, simple German and Latin sentences explained the everyday world in

which children were living: *ovis balat* - the sheep bleats;

infans ejulat - the child cries; *mus mintrit* - the mouse squeaks.

The chapters covered nature, crafts, anatomy and even other religions. The first English translation appeared after only a year and reprints were required even as late as the nineteenth century, so he probably influenced more European children over a longer period than any other educator.



WHO PUT THE FIZZ IN FIZZ?²

Champagne is a French sparkling wine with a fantastic image, kept alive by a large marketing budget. Many believe that this wine was invented by *Dom Perignon* (1638 - 1715), the cellar master at the abbey of Hautvillers. However, the name is owned by the *Grande Marque* Mœt & Chandon. In a previous life I was a wine buyer and a member of the Academy du Champagne so I was always a little skeptical about the story. To the best of my knowledge, the following is what really happened.

The vineyards of Champagne around Reims and Epernay are at the northern edge of grape growing in France - many actually face north - which meant that the vines did not produce

enough sugar. Also the cellars, many being Roman chalk quarries, were cold so the yeast (the bloom on the grape) could not be fully active. Casks exported to London were at first kept in the Port of London Authority cellars that were comparatively warm. This led to the wines continuing their interrupted fermentation, a bi-product of which was carbon dioxide. So it could be said (or at least whispered) that the British tasted Champagne before the French! Meanwhile, in a forgotten corner of southern France, the winemakers were reportedly making sparkling *Blanquette de Limoux* in the 1500s.

In 1662, Englishman, Dr Christopher Merret presented an eight-page document to the newly formed Royal Society detailing the recipe for bottle-fermented sparkling wine. The paper detailed the experiments made by cider makers, who had added sugar to dry cider before bottling it, leading to a second fermentation that made sparkling cider. Merret was even the first recorded person to use the term “sparkling wine” as well as being the first to describe the purposeful addition of sugar to wine to make it sparkling. Not only that, but Merret was innovative in making the bottles that carried the sparkling wine. He helped to invent (pioneered by Sir Kenelm Digby) a bottle that was hard enough to withstand the pressure of sparkling wine by using coal instead of charcoal in the glass furnace. The coal created hotter temperatures which in turn made stronger glass.



In those days the Champenois regarded bubbles as a problem to be removed whereas in England it was welcomed. If you look at the names of the Grandes Marques such as Krug, Mœt, Bollinger, Heidsieck and Deutz, you will see that there is a strong German element. If you also look at the places where it was not easy to make decent wine you will see that the locals have invented (or imported) other techniques, so Cognac, Armagnac, Sherry, Port etc. Brandy needs acidic wine and so does sparkling wine, to hold the bubbles. The Germans were far more technically minded than the French. As they too were, at least in parts, at the limits of wine growing, they developed unfermented must as a way of adding sugar to their wines. In poor years they also turned the grape juice into Sekt (sparkling wine).

So in Champagne a marriage between Germans and French made a lot of sense - despite the Marne being in the direct path of invading armies. You may also have noted that the word *Veuve* crops up in Champagne names. This means widow and refers to the fact that with husbands taken by warfare it was left to the wives to run the business. Some were extremely good at it, the most notable being Veuve Cliquot, under whose reign the firm developed *Remuage*, the technique of riddling out the sediment resulting from a second fermentation in bottle (below). This has now been superseded by the *gyropalette*, an idea of the clever Cava producers of Spain's Catalan northeast. They invented a computer controlled machine that can riddle a whole pallet at a time. You will no doubt see examples of the older method but this is purely for the tourists.



I have no wish to denigrate Dom Pierre Perignon, who contributed much to the

making of Champagne but there were also others such as fellow Benedictines Dom Thierry Ruinart (1657 - 1709) and Frère Jean Oudart (1654 - 1742). As with many other inventions, there often was not just one protagonist. Oh and going back to wines with high acidity: sparkling wine making has been a huge success in Britain, pioneered (mainly) by an American couple, Stuart and Sandy Moss (right), who bought an estate near Storrington in Sussex named *Nyetimber*. Knowing nothing about wine they travelled to Champagne and asked the obvious question *could we produce this in England? Oui!* So next time you celebrate with Champagne, raise a glass to all these unsung heroes (and heroines). *“Only the unimaginative can fail to find a reason for drinking Champagne”* - Oscar Wilde.



SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL³



Sue and I met in Canterbury in the 1960's and she celebrated her 21st birthday at the George & Dragon in Fordwich. Planning a return visit, I see that Fordwich is the smallest town in England with a population of 381.

In Roman times Fordwich was the ford at which the Roman road to Reculver (Regulbium) crossed the Stour. But it was with the silting up of the Stour after the Roman departure that sees Fordwich develop as the port of Canterbury – a role it fulfilled up until the building of the *Crab*

and Winkle Railway line in the 1840s which gave Canterbury a link to the sea at Whitstable. Fordwich is a beautiful and ancient port on the River Great Stour (above), two miles downstream from the City of Canterbury.

Although Fordwich has never boasted more than a few hundred inhabitants, its right to style itself a town dates from 1184, when King Henry II granted it a Merchant Guild Charter, reflecting its importance as the de facto port for Canterbury. In the Domesday Book, it was described as a small burgh, one of only seven burghs in Kent. Since the 13th century, Fordwich has been involved with the Cinque Ports through its geographical and institutional links with Sandwich. Fordwich Town Council today is, in legal terms, a parish council after the original Fordwich corporation, with its liberty and privileges, was abolished in the local government reorganisation of 1886. The 16th century town hall is shown right. However, the



chairman of the Council is styled the Mayor, and on ceremonial occasions wears a chain of office as well as other mayoral accoutrements. By custom the Mayor also serves as Mayor Deputy to the Mayor of Sandwich, thus preserving the historic Cinque Ports link.

THE APOTHECARY



Apothecaries were the ancient precursor of the pharmacist supplying drugs and herbal remedies to both the physicians and patients. Their studies fed into the early understanding of chemistry, along with such groups as the dyers and alchemists. You can see from our piece on ink how long ago an understanding of simple chemistry goes back. The word Apothecary derives from the Ancient Greek for a repository or storehouse. The art has been traced back to ancient Babylon in at least 2600 BC but of course it was also practiced in early India and China.

In the Middle Ages it was strongly pursued by the Islamic countries with shops in Baghdad recorded in the year 754. Their knowledge transferred to Andalusia by the 11th century and was recorded by Chaucer (1342 - 1400) in England. In Renaissance Italy it was the nuns who kept this knowledge alive. Back in England, their status rose and by 1617 they had their own livery company, the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries which grew out of the medieval (1180) Guild of Pepperers. In 1669, Dr Christopher Merrett (he of Champagne above) published *A Short View of the Frauds and Abuses committed by Apothecaries*. Although there were undoubtedly fraudulent practices the physicians and surgeons record was not particularly brilliant.

The Royal College of Physicians was founded in 1518 and the Royal College of Surgeons in 1800. This late date is due to the original 1540 college being of Barber-Surgeons (think blood-letting). These colleges and livery companies were a form of 'closed shop' and were very protective of their rights. This meant that they were often at loggerheads with each other. Nicholas Culpeper (1616 to 1654) wrote *The English Physitian* is a source of pharmaceutical and

herbal lore, and encompassed medical astrology, typical of the time. His *Complete Herbal*, was highly influential on both sides of the Atlantic and is I believe still in print. The engraving by Richard Gaywood (right) is in the British Museum. The 1730 Apothecary's chest shown on page 5 is in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Famous apothecaries include Paracelsus, Dante Aligheri, Nostradamus, John Keats and Hildegard of Bingen who no doubt prescribed one of her local wines, Trittenheimer Apotheke (the Germans still use the word apothecary). An interesting book is *The Herbalist (Nicholas Culpeper and the fight for medical freedom)* by Benjamin Woolley Harper Collins 2004).

DEAD RECKONING⁴



Pope Formosus (left) was a reasonably good pope and died in office in 896 - but his successor, Stephen VI, could not wait for revenge. He had the body exhumed eight months after his death, dressed in papal robes and propped up to face what became known as the *Cadaver Synod*. He was found guilty of perjury and coveting the papacy and punished by having three fingers of his right hand cut off (the ones used to give blessings). He was reburied then later dug up and thrown in the Tiber. Almost immediately the basilica of the Lateran was largely destroyed by earthquake and of course interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure.

The Roman people were not impressed and Stephen was deposed after six months, imprisoned and then strangled. Formosus' body was rescued and returned to St Peter's. In the early Tenth century, Pope Sergius III reconfirmed the conviction but as this meant that all the priests he had ordained (and everyone they in turn had ordained) were not really priests, it was too much for the Curia to cope with and Sergius was simply ignored. Actually, Sergius was in no place to 'cast the first stone'.

The *Saeculum obscurum*, also known as the Rule of the Harlots or the *Pornocracy*, was a period in the history of the papacy during the first two thirds of the 10th century, following the chaos after the death of Pope Formosus which saw seven or eight papal elections in as many years. It began with the installation of Pope Leo V - who came from the unfortunately named village of Priapi - in 903 and lasted until 964. During this period, the popes were influenced strongly by a powerful and allegedly corrupt aristocratic family, the Theophylacti, and their relatives and allies. The era is seen as one of the lowest points of the history of the papal office. Ed: understatement. More of this story in the next edition.

1. Taken from *Nature's Mutiny* by Philipp Blom (Picador 2020). Pics courtesy of Wikipedia, in the Public Domain.
2. There are too many sources to name individually. The picture of Dr Merrett comes from the Royal College of Physicians and the Mosses from Stuart's obit in the Telegraph.
3. Photos courtesy of KentLive and Britain Express. Information largely from Fordwich Town Council.
4. Article taken from *The Interesting Bits* (The History you might have missed) by Justin Pollard (John Murray 2007). Engraving by Cavallieri 1588, in the Public Domain. Also includes passages from Wikipedia and *The Popes* by John Julius Norwich (Vintage 2012).