

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

“Upon a faldstool wrought in purest gold, Sits Charlemagne, the king who rules all France. White is his beard and hoary is his head, His stature noble and his countenance proud – No need to point him out to any man.”
from The Song of Roland by Turoludus

This month J&T 181 we pay a visit to old London town with its sites and sounds, forgotten trades and some old street names, and then to the Carolingian Empire where deeply ingrained grudges persist.

JOHN STOW¹

Stow's *A Survey of London* was written in 1598 and gives us a unique insight into Sixteenth century life. I am sure you all know about the London guilds and that the different trades congregated in particular parts of the City.

However, he writes: *Men of trades and sellers of wares in this city have oft times since changed their places, as they have found their best advantage. For whereas mercers and haberdashers used to keep their shops in West Cheap, of later time they held them on London Bridge, where partly they yet remain. The goldsmiths of Gutheron's Lane and Old Exchange are now for the most part removed into the south side of West Cheap' the pepperers and grocers of Soper's Lane are now in Bucklersbury and other places dispersed. The drapers of Lombard Street and of Cornhill are seated in Candlewick Street and Watling Street, the skinners from St Mary Pellipers or at the Axe, into Budge Row and Walbrook: the stockfishmongers in Knightriders Street and Bridge Street; the ironmongers of Ironmongers' Lane and Old Jury into Thames Street; the vintners from the Vintry into divers places. But the brewers for the more part remain near to the friendly waters of the Thames;*



the butchers in East Cheap, St Nicholas Shambles and the Stocks Market; the hosiers of old time in Hosier Lane, near unto Smithfield, are since removed into Cordwainer Street, the upper part thereof by Bow Church, and last of all into Birchoveries Lane by Cornhill; the shoemakers and curriers of Cordwainer Street removed, the one to St Martin's le Grand, the other to London Wall near unto Moorgate; the founders remain by themselves in Lothbury; cooks or pastelers, for the more part in Thames Street, the other dispersed into divers part; poulterers of late removed out of the Poultry,

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betwixt the stocks and the great conduit in Cheap, into Grass Street and St. Nicholas Shambles; bowyers from Bowyers' Row by Ludgate into divers places, and almost worn out, with the fletchers; paternoster makers of old time, or bede makers, and text writers, are gone out of Paternoster Row, and are called stationers of Paul's Churchyard; patten-makers of St Margaret, Pattens' Lane, clean worn out; labourers every work day are to be found in Cheap, about Soper's Lane End; horse-coursers and sellers of oxen, sheep, swine and such like, remain in their old market at Smithfield.

As you can see, punctuation was in its infancy. I think that a little explanation is due as some of the trade's no longer use these titles.

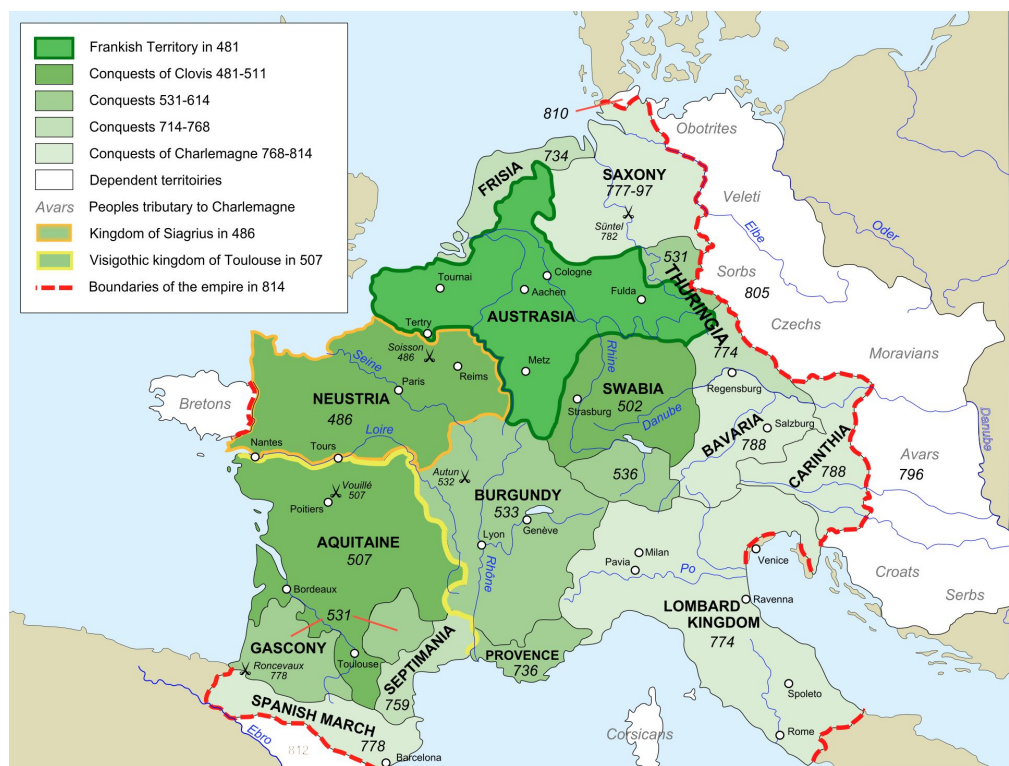
- ❖ Mercers dealt in cloth whereas haberdashers provided small sewing items.
- ❖ Pepperers were spice merchants, and grocers sold food items.
- ❖ Drapers provided clothing, and sold textiles.
- ❖ Stockfishmongers specialised in dried cod and ironmongers in metal household items.
- ❖ Vintners dealt in wine and hosiers in socks, leggings and stockings.
- ❖ Cordwainers dealt in leather, principally shoes. The name comes from Cordoba in Spain.
- ❖ Skinners prepared skins whilst curriers, from the Latin coriarius, tanned leather.
- ❖ Founders cast metal in foundries whilst pastelers were pastry cooks.
- ❖ Poulterers dealt in birds for the table, especially game.
- ❖ Bowyers made bows and fletchers made the arrows to go with them, from the French flèche.
- ❖ Paternosters (Our Father) were an early form of rosary for Catholic devotion. Bede = bead.
- ❖ Pattens were platform shoes designed to keep your feet out of the street mud etc.
- ❖ Horse-coursers were simply dealers in horses.

CHARLES THE GREAT ²

Known in Germany as Karl der Große in France as Charles-le-magne and perhaps more generally as Charlemagne (748 - 814 AD), the Frankish founder of the Carolingian Empire that encompassed much of Europe. He was one of History's great characters and influences Europe even today. His legacy and the myth that now surrounds him, makes it difficult to get to the actual personality. Whereas he seems to be an all-round good egg (although he may have sired 20 children), there is however one blotch on his escutcheon.

There was a whole series of wars to create the empire and then keep it. Perhaps the biggest thorn in Charlemagne's side was

the Saxons. They were pacified and swore oaths of allegiance but as soon as the Emperor was engaged on the other side of Europe, they would attack. In 782 Charlemagne had had enough and at Verden-an-der-Aller, after pacifying them once again, ordered the beheading of 4,500 Saxons. Now some historians query the veracity of this event or the numbers involved but the people of Saxony have never forgotten it. Right is the Sachsenhain memorial to the victims of the massacre. Interestingly, German historians during the last war started to vilify Charlemagne but were stopped





by Hitler who wanted to use Karl as an example of a European unifying force in Europe. In fact this myth has since been adopted by the EU as a foundation symbol.

Now the Anglo-Saxons began invading England about 450 AD. Charlemagne never attacked England but did have diplomatic and trading relations, especially with King Offa. In fact there is a letter from Charlemagne to Offa which is our oldest surviving diplomatic document:

Charles, by the grace of God king of the Franks and Lombards, patrician of the Romans, to his esteemed and dearest brother Offa, king of the Mercians, sendeth health; First, we give thanks to God Almighty for the purity of the Catholic faith, which we find laudably expressed in your letters. Concerning pilgrims, who for the love of God or for the salvation of their souls wish to visit the residence of the holy apostles, let them go peaceably without any molestation; but if persons not seeking the cause of religion but that of gain be found among them, let them pay the customary tolls in proper places. We will, too, that traders have due protection within our kingdom, according to our mandate, and if in any place they suffer wrongful oppression, let them appeal to us or our judges, and we will see full justice done. Let your grace also be apprised that we have sent some token of our regard, out of our dalmatics and palls, to each episcopal see of your kingdom and of Ethelredās, as an almsgiving, for the sake of our apostolical lord Adrian (the late pope) earnestly begging that you would order him to be prayed for, not as doubting that his blessed soul is at rest, but to show our esteem and regard to our dearest friend. Moreover we have sent somewhat out of the treasures of those earthly riches which the Lord Jesus has granted to us of his unmerited bounty, for the metropolitan cities; and for yourself a belt, an Hungarian sword, and two silk cloaks.



2,000 YEARS AGO³

Why do archaeologists rave over the find shown in the photo left? It is part of an Iron Age hoard found in West Norfolk during a routine excavation for a new building site by Pre-Construct Archaeology. The pièce de résistance is a rare *Carnyx*, an animal-headed Celtic war trumpet. It was amazingly fragile and took the skill of senior conservator Jonathan Clark of Norfolk Museum Services to remove it from its earthen grave.

EX LIBRIS⁴

My latest purchase is *The London Encyclopedia* edited by Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (Macmillan Reference Books 1995). It is a large tome which you can just dip in to for some fascinating history. Here are some examples:

Tooting Bec. Believed to come from the Anglo-Saxon *the dwelling of the sons of Totas*. Back in the 13th century the land was owned by the Abbey of St Mary Bec in Normandy. There is a record of the Abbot setting up a gallows there in 1258. Edward II seized all the land belonging to alien priories but this was reversed by Edward III. A writer in the 19th century described Tooting as *a very pretty district of hills and woods and tiny streams*.

During WWI the Rev. Tubby Clayton established Talbot House at Poperinghe *for the physical and spiritual needs of troops temporarily withdrawn from the battlefield*. It was affectionately known as Toc H after the signaller's alphabet. After the war it became based on Tower Hill with its special church of All Hallows by the Tower.

Tooley Street. A corruption of St Olave's Street and also known as *Short Southwark* to distinguish it from Borough High Street which was called *Long Southwark*. During the Middle Ages it was the home of wealthy clerics. In my wine trade days we stored wine in the railway arches of Tooley Street.

37 Fleet Street. The home of Hoare's Bank founded by Goldsmith Richard Hoare in 1672. The original site was The Golden Bottle in Cheapside but by 1690 they could afford bigger premises. Clients included Samuel Pepys, Catherine



of Breganza, John Evelyn and John Dryden. They have three branches in the West End and are still privately owned. Their family seat was Stourhead in Wiltshire, where they commissioned Capability Brown to construct a fabulous garden (below). One of the descendants was Sir Richard Colt-Hoare, a well known antiquarian, who wrote the definitive history of Wiltshire. The family were devastated by WWI and the property passed to the National Trust in 1947.



EX LIBRIS

A fun new addition to the J&T library is *Altered English* by Jeffrey Kacirk (Pomegranate Communications 2002) which is sub-titled *Surprising meanings of familiar words*. Here are some examples:

Bachelor: A person who, though a knight, had not a sufficient number of vassals to have his banner carried before him into battle. He therefore had to follow another. Bacca is a cow in Latin and baccalaria a cowherd, so one who is too junior to lead the herd.

Domino: A kind of hood worn by canons and also a veil worn by women mourners. Also a loose cloak worn at Venetian mascarades. The game was named after the garment, from the black backs of the pieces. Also means a blow or last of a series from the last stroke of a military or naval flogging.

Ilk: Applied to a Scottish gentleman whose name is the same as his estate eg Menzie of Menzies. These rare families are more honorable than new-made nobles.

Plagiarist: One who kidnaps a slave. Martial (c40 - 103 AD) applies it to one who kidnaps other men's brains.

Silly: From the German *selig* meaning blessed. Both goodness and foolishness became intertwined in the word until over time the latter predominated.



FEBRUARY 14TH⁶

The origin of Valentine's day is obscure and not really related to a saint, though Fr Alban Butler, in his *Lives of the Saints* (Tan Books 1955), tells the story of a priest in the time of Claudius II, reigned 268 - 270) who aided martyrs was sent to the Prefect in Rome who, finding he could not make him renounce his faith, had him beaten and beheaded. According to ancient custom, this was the day on which birds choose their mates (Thomas Blount 1656), as in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. It was also a day when the French and English courts held *joyous recreation and conversation about love*.

There was also a custom of drawing lots, usually with boys making the choice but sometimes with both sexes making a choice. This became accompanied by gifts, including the ploughboy's love-knot of plaited straw.⁵



1. A Survey of London by John Stow, forward by Antonia Fraser (The History Press 2009). The 16th Century Tudor buildings at Staple Inn on High Holborn, home to shops and barristers; legal chambers, London. Royalty free courtesy of Robert Harding, Look Photos.
2. Reference: *King and Emperor* by Janet L Nelson (Penguin Books 2020). Map of Frankish Empire 481 - 814 from the Historical Atlas by William R. Shepherd (Shepherd, William. *Historical Atlas*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911).
3. Courtesy of Historic England.
4. Photo courtesy of Tripadvisor.
5. *The Customs and Ceremonies of Britain* by Charles Kightly (Thames & Hudson 1986).
6. The Parliament of Birds, by Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton