

Victors of The Nile

The Victors of The Nile are a group of radical historians, each bearing the first name Victor. This was a complete coincidence, technically speaking, but of course it is well known that one's name has a bearing on one's character, and these fourteen men were all extremely intrepid as a direct result of being called Victor.

The 'Nile' part of the group's name comes from a mishearing of the word 'denial', which is a state that the historians are notoriously often in, particularly when listening to one another's latest hypotheses. The Victors thought that 'The Nile' sounded rather grand and so did not correct the person that first referred to them as such. They now claim it as an allusion to the vast reach, in both time and space, of their academic enquiry.

The ongoing subject of their strenuous denial and unremitting competition is the identification of prime causes in history. Through a combination of rigorous research, surgical analysis and athletic leaps of the imagination, The Victors of The Nile have identified many important, but previously overlooked, occurrences by which we can explain, and indeed understand, some of the most pivotal phenomena of the 20th century.

Unknown - *Basking Shark on Brighton Beach* (GAC 14556) Samuel Howitt - *Bat Fowling* (GAC 13702)

These pictures relate how three men were trapped inside a basking shark when, in pursuit of a rare bat, they unwittingly followed it into the cavernous mouth. Once they had realised their mistake the fleshy throat valves prevented any chance of escape and so, in the long tradition of swallowed seamen, they settled down to await the biological event that would eventually expel them from the fish's body, living in the meantime on their generous expedition rations of sugared dormice.

The disappearance of these eminent evolutionary biologists sparked suspicions that they had been kidnapped, since Wapping, the location of their field study, was too well signposted for them to have simply gotten lost. Local zealots of an occult Judeo-Christian sub-faction, vocal in their denouncement of all logical causality at the time, were held accountable and chased from the city by vigilantes. Despite their hasty retreat the zealots were at pains to take with them all documentation of how to entreat the minor saints to spread The Word, resulting in a dearth of communication infrastructure. This was immediately replaced, however, by such earthbound dissemination technologies as the printing press and gossip.

The shark eventually died of toxic shock syndrome from the trapped biologists' oil lamps, although the corpse rotted around the men for a fortnight before the skin was thin enough for their voices to be heard by nearby fishermen. The fact that the shark

had neither been tidied away nor sold on for its various by-products was indicative of a community increasingly distracted by the racing form and scandal sheets – those proliferating organs of the dawning techno-rational age.

William Nelson Gardiner – *Sir Robert Shirley, Count Shirley in the papal nobility* (GAC 15851)

S Edwards - *Fire-Backed Pheasant* (GAC 16967)

As you can tell from the startlingly human glint in the pheasant's eye, this is no bird but a man in a costume. These are the commemorative 'before and after' prints of Albert Einstein when he was pegged as frontrunner for the prize at a fancy dress party thrown by Werner Heisenberg on his birthday in December 1926. Einstein was eventually disqualified, as the judges were convinced this was a real bird masquerading as a man in costume. The venerable physicist protested with all his eloquence, but the panel were of one voice, claiming this was a clever trick performed by a well-trained bird.

This precipitated a spate of copycat crimes, with fancy dress contestants sending to parties the character they were supposedly going as, instead of actually dressing up and going themselves. In one reported incident, in July 1927, a young Greta Garbo turned up at a party claiming to be Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in drag; and later that year Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst sent a horse to a party in their stead, scooping the first prize of ten bob, which they never retrieved from their double-crossing accomplice.

This fad for cheating ended abruptly, however, with the advent of Hollywood and its attendant sleazy tabloids. One could never be sure if the celebrity you'd planned to send wouldn't behave appallingly and drag one's own name through very public mud. However, a consequence of note from this period of collusion and illusion was the profound uncertainty that Heisenberg would continue to feel in relation to the visible world.

William Alexander - *Economy of Time and Labor, exemplified in a Chinese Waterman* (GAC 16975)

William Alexander – *Punishment of Tcha* (GAC 16976)

This pair of images provides evidence that what came to be known as Fordism was not developed by the industrialist Henry Ford but by an unknown Chinese agronomist centuries before. By repurposing the hierarchical structures employed by the project managers of the Great Wall of China – famously analysed by Franz Kafka in a European-funded white paper – the anonymous agronomist developed a means of production that fuelled bumper yields comparable to those of mass industrialisation.

The managerial structure that Kafka describes hinges on the fact that no one worker is in correspondence with any other besides his direct superior and subordinate, thereby making it impossible to piece together an overview of the operation as a whole. The agronomist is thought to have applied this principle to the human body, creating a dissociation based on ignorance between each of a worker's limbs. This way no worker would know when he was totally tired, and so each limb would continue to toil through industrial-strength barriers of exhaustion until the end of the shift. Apprentices were required to undertake intensive training, which included, as we see in the upper image here, variations on the idea of rubbing the stomach while patting the head. The lower image relates how dexterity was drummed home through a demanding array of reward and punishment techniques.

Ford would not even begin to approach this level of nuanced training. His workers were required to form a full-bodied relation with the machine, with a single job achieved by way of a single action performed repeatedly by each worker. History now tells us that, rather than being celebrated for facilitating mass production and consumer choice, Ford should be upbraided for missing a trick and asking too little of his infamously alienated workers, who, it turns out, could have been much more alienated in and of themselves.

Edward Duncan – *British Western Nave at the Great Exhibition* (GAC 13906)

Charles Forrest – *A View of Pigeon Island & Part of St Lucia* (GAC 819)

This pair of souvenir prints shows us the interior and exterior of the seagoing gallery-in-a-ship HMS Lyle. The inaugural groundbreaking exhibition was influential not for its content but because of how the artworks were installed. The course of history was not changed through any revolutionary drive towards abstraction; neither was there any particularly fragrant nude to cause a scandal. The pivotal factor, we now know, was a newly invented contraption called 'gimbles'.

Gimbles are a hinged bracketing system that ensures that whatever is mounted to the hull or bulkhead remains upright as the ship pitches and rolls. These small miracles were spotted by an art-loving commodore and subsequently installed in all ships' galleys, providing steady cooking conditions for onboard chefs. The subsequent top-notch cuisine went on to fuel the postcolonial era, as voyagers – from military personnel to tradesmen to gap-year tourists – would no longer turn up at ports on the other side of the world malnourished, fractious and demanding the comforts of home.

David Wilkie - *Blind Man's Buff* (GAC 15867)

Thomas Sandby - *Whitehall Gateway* (GAC 11132)

Here are documentary images from the first ever criminal psychology case study. The study describes how the inhabitants of the Whitehall Gateway – four generations of the family that tend the grounds of the White Hall that lies beyond it – have been boarded up in their quarters for poaching. From the vantage point of the right-hand picture – observed through a clinical panopticon installed by way of a spy hole in an oil painting of Lady White Hall herself – we can analyse the unfurling disarray: an odd shoe kicked off here, a chair left hanging awkwardly over a door there, golf clubs hidden up in the rafters and, most incriminatingly, three pies cooling on a high shelf beyond reach. The room, then, is analogous to the unruly moral interior of each family member, producing an infinite regress of chaos when we consider how, inside each depicted person's head, there must also be a chaotic room, just like this, full of people, each with a head, inside which is a chaotic room, just like this, full of people, each with a head, inside which is a chaotic room, just like this, full of people, each with a head, inside which...

The analyst goes on to note that most objects are held neurotically up off the floor, as if in defiance of gravity, and yet the family members precipitate themselves downwards or to the edge of the room. This, he asserts, is a classic strategy, whereby the subject attempts to blame his or her actions on the prevailing laws of nature. And it is a complementary, but equally futile, symbolic act, he goes on, that has placed the seventy-two blackbirds, poached and baked into the three pies, up in the rafters of the gatehouse. This absurd attempt to repatriate the birds to the skies is not perceived to equate to remorse or atonement, however, but is a symptom of the 'you can't see me' syndrome, a state of neurotic denial so viscerally played out here by the central blind-folded figure.

William Hogarth – *The Pool of Bethesda* (GAC 13699)

Robert Bowyer – *Dresden* (GAC 15640)

The first picture here relates to the President of France Charles de Gaulle's state visit to the newly opened municipal pool at Bethesda in northwest Wales. As he shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with pool attendants and bathers, de Gaulle was deeply impressed by the bonhomie of the staff-client relationship. Most leisure centres manufacture a high-octane atmosphere of strained nerves and fractious ambition, but here the mood was more a blousy Bacchanalia perforated with nonchalance.

After close analysis of this curiosity de Gaulle surmised that it must be the regulation loose-fitting cotton garments that produced such a positive atmosphere, the flow of air emolliating and invigorating the skin. De Gaulle carried this image about with him for many years, sensing that it could come in handy at a later date.

That moment did indeed arise in 1967, when public opinion of the President was wavering. In anticipation of the civil unrest that erupted in May the following year, de Gaulle absented himself to Baden-Baden for a summit with fashion gurus and high-

street retailers, where he persuaded them of the utmost necessity for manmade fibres to saturate the wardrobes of France. The right-hand image here shows the pattern cutters of nearby Dresden curing great swathes of fabric of petro-chemical origin to 'bake in' its sweat-producing qualities.

The riots of May 1968 were ultimately quashed by the French military, a victory made easier by dint of the students' agitated unease and uncoordinated impulsiveness – a state easily recognisable to anyone who has worn layers of manmade fibres in an overheated situation.

Thomas Rowlandson & Augustus Charles Pugin – *Water Engine, Cold Bath Fields Prison* (GAC 2527)

Benjamin Cole – *The West Prospect of the Parish Church of St. Olave* (GAC13721)

The left-hand picture here shows the front and back elevation of the first Department of Human Resources (DHR). The original purpose of the DHR was to test the limits of what humans could be paid to do. The limit differs according to the relative affluence of a community, but in contemporary Britain it lies somewhere between shovelling excrement and sex without love. In the right-hand image we see people pumping water by hand – a job that no one has been prepared to do in the UK since 1933.

The findings of the DHR are most impactful when appropriated by propaganda bureaus. In World War II the Special Operations Executive secured a record number of recruits when it was intoned, through colourful posters and loud newsreels, that Nazi plans involved the diversion of all mains and bottled water to the Caribbean for use in a large-scale magic trick.

Thomas Rowlandson & Augustus Charles Pugin - *Royal Circus* (GAC 14747)

H Smith - *Kidwelly Castle* (GAC 438)

This pair of images demonstrates how culture has been disseminated through hidden channels, enabling them to persist unchanged for generations. The secret lies in the buildings that surround us. Architects throughout the ages have been commissioned, begged and even bribed to slip in subliminal 'scores' for cultural artefacts such as ditties, pantomimes and urban myths. As the requests were often far from official, we have no records of who initiated them or why. We do, however, know that the scattered syntax can be consolidated into an entire language, which we tacitly read as we pass through built-up areas.

Here we can see how the elevations of Kidwelly Castle are in fact a score for a full musical theatre production of the enduring song *Tea For Two Hundred*, commonly misread as a *pièce a deux*, due to a storm in 1837 demolishing the castle's arsenal

tower. The castle's ramparts, windows and crenulations become a graphical code, conveying details of set design, choreography, melody and lyrics by way of their angles, lengths, shapes and textures.

Other embedded scores to be found in the UK are the words to *Hey Diddle Diddle* in the front elevation of the MI6 Headquarters on the banks of the Thames, and the full production script to Verdi's *La Traviata* in the traffic flow system of the Gravelly Hill Interchange (aka Spaghetti Junction).

William Henry Toms - *St Thomas's Hospital* (GAC 12801)

Charles Bentley – *Ataraipu, or The Devil's Rock* (GAC 3632)

The promontory known as The Devil's Rock forged its way up from the earth's molten core way back before the invention of time itself. The group of early nineteenth-century pilgrims you see reposing and dining in front of the rock have travelled for many days in order to cook ceremonial devilled eggs in its shadow, as this was believed to cut cooking time in half. There are only five such promontories around the globe – including one seldom seen, but often used, right here in London.

As we know, time was invented in order to prevent everything happening at once, and the right-hand image here shows us the sprawl of London around St Thomas's Hospital, where many things have happened at all different times. Much of this affluent district was financed by the spice industry, and particularly the import of cayenne pepper – the main constituent of the culinary devilling process. At the height of their financial powers, a small coterie of devilling spice-trading pilgrims built a hospital on the site as a smokescreen, so that they might keep the secret of their short cooking times to themselves for commercial gain. The hospital's incinerating tower was built over and around the timeless rock that fills its bottom two floors; and there is, to this day, a very good Bangladeshi restaurant next door, where the service is suspiciously speedy and the food devilishly hot.

Unknown Artist – *Procession Attending the Great National Petition of 3,317,702 to the House of Commons* (5652)

William Oliver – *The Conflagration of the Tower of London* (9470)

The three million citizens you see marching here are calling for the implementation of a new alphanumerical science known as the 'binary system'. The two men behind this instrument of socio-political change can be seen in the central panel of the left-hand image. The prominent small scientists Dr Longcarry and Dr Bookhouse carry within their diminutive forms the hereditary material of generations of scientists confined to smaller and smaller laboratories as technology shrank. In their tiny hands they clutch the fundamental symbols of their revolutionary system: the 1 and the 0.

The binary system would be instrumental in compressing written communication, requiring people to learn not twenty-six, but two symbols in total. The resultant higher levels of binaracy would have undoubtedly led to greater social mobility and the proposal was unanimously embraced by MPs of all parties, with a bill passed to introduce the new system, and outlaw the Roman alphabet, the very next day.

MPs rejoiced over a traditional alpine fondue dinner, which carbon dating has since revealed was spiked. It was most likely a spin-doctor, in those days known as stirrers, who added a quantity of homebrewed liquor that renders a man uncommonly suggestible, as evidenced by the rapt diners in the right-hand panel. But so much was added that it stirred up great paranoia: a milligram of scepticism about the new legislation swelled into a full-blown revolt, culminating with the bill being thrown out of Parliament and Longcarry, Bookhouse and their binary handbook being thrown into the Tower of London.

Unluckily, a breakout was planned by Tower inmates for that very night. In the resulting conflagration the scientists were killed and their work lost to history, until the dawn of the computing era centuries later. Ironically, the prisoners responsible were due for release the following week, but their chronic illiteracy had prevented them from reading their notes of discharge.

Johann Zoffany – *Royal Academy of the Arts* (17686)

John Thomas Smith – *Savoy Prison* (9535)

This pair of images depicts the surprising development of one of London's most famous and upmarket establishments. We see the gang of inmates that referred to themselves as Royale's Academy of the A.R.T.S (the acronym standing for Amazingly Risky Tacticians of Survival). This band of merry prisoners, led by an inmate known simply as Royale, had been wrongly detained in Savoy Prison for many years due to an almost unbelievable series of administrative errors. After innumerable legitimate attempts to secure their release, the gang decided to take matters into their own hands and plan a daring and courageous escape. Being a rather genteel bunch, though, they used collectivity and cunning instead of violence or tools in cakes.

Aware of the prison's rather beautiful architecture, its abundance of men all ready to work and its full catering equipment and many, many bedrooms, Royale's gang spent the following years covertly converting the prison into a fully working hotel. Through gentle persuasion and enforced nudity the troop managed to convince the entire prison

– inmates and staff alike – to participate in their ruse, posing as porters, catering staff, housekeeping and the such. By 1889 the transformation was complete and one of London’s most luxurious hotels opened to the public, allowing Royale’s gang to waltz right out the front doors to freedom.

Charles Bentley – *Pirara and Lake Amucu, the Site of El Dorado* (3633)

Unknown Artist – *View of the Thames off Three Cranes Wharf when Frozen* (10145)

The three men we see deep in conversation in the foreground of the picture on the left may at first glance look right at home in the scene: their dress and ethnicity seems in keeping with the location. We can even see the gentleman who seems to be the leader of the three referring to another character on the outskirts of the village, as if very much embedded in his community.

This scene is not as tranquil as one might hope though. These are in fact local council planners completing a final risk assessment for a major controversial rejuvenation project. The project involves the damming of the local river, which would flood the majority of what we see here. Wary of criticism from constituents, the pointing man is demonstrating how they will relocate all those affected to a development of high-end flats on the other side of the distant mountain range.

Angry at the lack of consultation, the residents formed a community group and took decisive and evasive action, as seen in the right-hand image here. They fashioned, by the dead of night, long stilts for their homes and themselves, thereby raising the entire community above the oncoming floodwaters. The resulting ‘floating village’ became a lucrative tourist hotspot, and the council duly implemented a pay-as-you-go platform to better observe this curious community.

William Bigg – *A Lady and her children relieving a cottager* (14861)

Charles Bentley – *Christmas Cataracts on the River Berbice* (3631)

We see here the origins of the bottled water market, which has now grown into an international multi-billion pound industry. Bottled water was not originally a manmade product, rather it grew as naturally as grass in a field, around the eddies that develop at the bottom of some Caribbean waterfalls. It was harvested for centuries by the local population, who used it in religious rituals; although while the majority knew it held no special quality whatsoever, they generally went along with it anyway for the craic.

Upon arrival at one Caribbean island, where the bottled water grew aplenty, a rich family from Isleworth, Kent, were fascinated by its alleged magical powers. Despite the palpable unease displayed by their neighbours, the family began to farm the water and

export it at unsustainable levels to England, where it became the latest London fad. The demand for bottled water was so great that it was rumoured, and is indeed evidenced by the right-hand image here, that the poor, once hooked, would even consider selling their children for just rag soaked in the stuff.

Unsurprisingly, the natural stocks of bottled water soon dried up and, in a rather outrageous attempt to keep their business alive, the Isleworthians began selling normal water decanted into plastic or glass bottles, sometimes adding a validating supernatural twist to the drink by carbonating it to suggest a magic force popping from its surface.

Thomas Homer Shepherd - *Prerogative Will Office* (10930)
John Vanderbank - *George Lambert Painter* (17704)

The offices of renowned medium Prerogative Will are shown here alongside an artist's impression of the man himself. It is well documented that Prerogative Will was a famously reclusive character, never revealing his face to a single client, instead hiding behind elaborate masks so life-like they were rumoured to be either wrought by the gods or snatched from the heads of real men.

The only way to ascertain that you were indeed in the presence of the real Prerogative Will was to check his horribly disfigured right pinkie finger. While the cause of this disfigurement remains unaccounted for, it unfairly tainted his earlier fame, as the society pages labelled him a rogue and a charlatan simply because his cocking finger was deemed 'over-cranked'.