

Lives & Times

*Achievements of the Famous and
Remarkable, Age by Age*

Edmund Morrison



INKBEE

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TWENTY

*The first published poem of **John Keats**, 'O Solitude!', appeared in 'The Examiner' in 1816.*

Keats's first volume of poetry was published in the following year and his celebrated work *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and other Poems* in 1820. It contained his odes (which include 'To a Nightingale'), and was to be the last work he would see in print. Keats died in Rome in 1821 at the age of twenty-five. His gravestone does not contain his name, as he requested, but describes him as a young English poet ending with his chosen words: 'Here lies One Whose Name was Writ in Water'.

*'Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus', the first novel by **Mary Shelley**, was published in 1818.*

Mary (née Godwin) eloped with Percy Shelley in 1814, and they married two years later following the death of Shelley's first wife, Harriet. The story of Frankenstein was conceived while they were staying close to Lake Geneva, Switzerland, with company that included Lord Byron. After Percy Shelley died in 1822, Mary and their son returned to England where she continued to write novels, short stories, biographies and travelogues. She also promoted the publication and appreciation of her late husband's work. Mary Shelley died in 1851 at the age of fifty-three.

*In 1848 **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** was one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.*

Rossetti formed the group, which sought to take a different direction in British art from the conventional Royal Academy approach, in conjunction with John Millais and William Holman Hunt; others were to join the trio later in the year. Rossetti's first significant oil paintings, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, were exhibited in 1849 and 1850 respectively. His first volume of poetry was published in 1870 and drew

upon many of the poems that he had buried with his wife Elizabeth Siddal, but was later persuaded to have exhumed from her grave. Siddal was an important model for the Pre-Raphaelites and Rossetti in particular, and they married after an engagement that lasted a decade. However, less than two years after their union, Siddal died of an overdose of laudanum. Rossetti published a further volume of poems in 1881, the year before his death at the age of fifty-three.

*In 1919 **Jack Cohen** decided to start selling groceries from a market stall in London – the beginning of what would become the supermarket Tesco.*

Instead of returning to tailoring after service in the Royal Flying Corps, Cohen used some of his £30 demobilisation gratuity to buy surplus grocery stock and sell it on a Hackney stall. The name Tesco, initially deployed on his own brand of tea, would come a few years later, formed from the initials of T. E. Stockwell (a partner in the firm of his tea suppliers), and the first two letters of Cohen's surname. Cohen concentrated on market trading for several years before deciding to obtain premises. A decade after first starting out, he opened the first Tesco store in the Greater London suburb of Burnt Oak. The business continued to expand in and around London in the 1930s, with up to one hundred stores in place before the end of the decade. After the war, Tesco was among the first to introduce self-service supermarkets based on the American format. The sixties saw further growth, aided by acquisitions, and by the end of the seventies sales had reached £1 billion. Cohen was knighted in 1969. He died ten years later, at the age of eighty.

*The first West End production by **Noël Coward**, 'I'll Leave It to You', was given its London premiere at the New Theatre in 1920.*

Coward, who also starred in the play, had been a child actor – making his professional stage debut at the age of eleven as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish*. However, he is best-known as a playwright, and it was his play of 1924, *The Vortex*, that gave him his first major success. Other hits followed – including *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit*. Coward was also a composer of numerous songs (including 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' and 'Mad About the Boy'). In the cinematic arena he wrote, produced, co-directed and starred in the patriotic war film *In Which We Serve* (1942).

Percy Shaw lodged his patent application for *'Improvements Relating to Blocks for Road Surface Marking'*, better known as 'cat's eyes', in 1934.

Shaw stated in a television interview in the 1960s that he was inspired to create his invention when he was travelling home on a foggy night and realised that the reflective studs on a road sign would be beneficial on the road surface as well. He filed another patent for cat's eyes in 1935, which added the important self-cleaning mechanism. In the same year, Shaw also established a company, Reflecting Roadstuds, to manufacture the product. Sales were sluggish initially, but were boosted by the government's endorsement of their deployment on Britain's roads and the enforced blackout during the Second World War. Despite his success, Shaw lived an unostentatious lifestyle. His few luxuries included Two Rolls Royces and four television sets, three of which were tuned to one of the existing stations at the time, while the fourth served as a backup. Shaw also remained in the house that he had moved to at the age of two until his death in 1976, at the age of eighty-six. He was awarded an OBE in 1965.

In 1958 **Alec Guinness** won the Academy Award for best actor for his role as Colonel Nicholson in *'Bridge on the River Kwai'*.

Guinness's stage career began in his early twenties and, following the Second World War, he made his accredited film debut in *Great Expectations* (1946). Guinness demonstrated his versatility when he played eight different characters in the first of his several Ealing comedies, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). His first Oscar nomination was for another Ealing comedy, *The Lavendar Hill Mob* (1951). Four years later, Guinness received his first Bafta nomination for *The Prisoner* (1955). His portrayal of Lieutenant Colonel Nicholson in *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) brought him a slew of awards, including a Bafta for best British actor and a Golden Globe, in addition to his Oscar. Guinness was knighted in 1959. In the latter part of his career, he attracted a new audience with his role as Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi in *Star Wars* (1977), which also brought him his penultimate Academy Award nomination, for best supporting actor, in 1978. He received an honorary Oscar in 1980, and the Bafta Fellowship in 1989. His final Oscar nomination, for best supporting actor, came at the age of seventy-four for *Little Dorrit* (1988). He died in 2000 at the age of eighty-six.

*In 1961 **John F. Kennedy** was sworn in as the thirty-fifth president of the United States, following a close election victory over his Republican rival, Richard Nixon.*

During the campaign Kennedy and Nixon had both taken part in the first televised presidential candidate debates, which contrasted the youthful, relaxed image of Kennedy with that of a more nervous-looking Nixon. Kennedy is still the youngest person to be elected president (Theodore Roosevelt was forty-two, but assumed office as vice-president). Kennedy was a decorated World War Two hero who was elected to the House of Representatives after the war, and became a senator in 1952. His three years as president saw events such as the first manned spaceflights, the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the latter of which brought the world closer than at any other time to the spectre of nuclear war. However, the situation was peacefully defused, and in 1963 a partial Test Ban Treaty covering nuclear weapons was agreed between the US, the USSR and the UK. In 1961, Kennedy announced the goal of putting a man on the moon before the end of the decade, which was duly accomplished by Apollo 11 in July 1969. His domestic policies included the extension of civil rights, and his administration supported moves to end racial discrimination. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 while travelling in his Dallas motorcade. He was forty-six and was succeeded by his vice-president, Lyndon Johnson.

*In 1973 **Ronnie Barker** first appeared as Norman Stanley Fletcher in an episode of the series 'Seven of One' called 'Prisoner and Escort'.*

The *Seven of One* spin-off series *Porridge* ran for three seasons, and the character of Fletcher became one of Barker's most popular comedy roles. His stage career began in 1948 when he joined the Manchester Repertory Theatre, then based in Aylesbury. About eight years later he moved into radio work, becoming a regular cast member of *The Navy Lark*, which first aired in 1959. His television career also got underway, with its turning point being *The Frost Report* in 1966, which also brought him into contact with Ronnie Corbett; he would later front *The Two Ronnies* (1971–1987) with Corbett. As well as performing, Barker also wrote material for many of his shows, using pseudonyms such as Gerald Wiley to be sure that his contributions were being accepted on merit alone. Another long-running