

29th December

Memory Verse

**To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven.**

Ecclesiastes 3:1

This verse is the beginning of a beautiful piece of Bible poetry which is worth learning complete and very good for children to say out loud together. Younger children can learn the words in bold.

Some links with earlier lessons

Today is the anniversary of the start of the Jameson Raid (1895). There is information about this event in the lesson for 2nd November which you could read today if you missed it then. It is also the anniversary of the murder of Thomas à Becket in 1170. We learned about this on 6th October and again, if you missed that lesson, today would be a good day to read it.

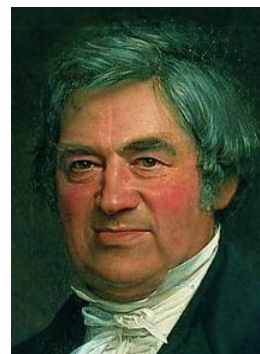
On 5th October we learned about missionary to the Native American Indians. David Brainerd.
On 29th December 1745 he wrote in his diary:

After public worship was over, I went to my house, proposing to preach again after a short season of intermission. But they soon came in one after another, with tears in their eyes, to know what they should do to be saved. . . . It was an amazing season of power among them, and seemed as if God had bowed the heavens and come down... and that God was about to convert the whole world.

God was truly blessing David Brainerd's work. We can pray today for all missionaries that they too will experience a "season of power" too.

Classification in Archaeology¹

We have had several lessons in which we looked at the importance of classifying things. Way back in January we learned about the work of Carl Linnaeus and John Ray in classifying plants and animals.² Later we came across Christian Hensen who invented the classification "plankton".³ We also learned about how music is classified.⁴ Classification is very important in other areas too. Consider a museum collection of ancient man-made objects. How might they be classified?



Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788-1865), born on 29th December was responsible for just such a classification system. He was also responsible for introducing some very misleading expressions which we often hear.

Christian Thomsen was from a wealthy family and he was a keen coin collector. Coin collectors classify their coins according to how much wear they have. Old coins in better condition are more valuable than those that are worn. When the Danish Royal Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Antiquities' first exhibition needed a curator, Thomsen was the obvious choice. He was wealthy and needed no salary and his coin collecting gave him some relevant experience.

1 Information from <https://creation.com/the-stone-age-a-figment-of-the-imagination> and other sources.

2 See the lessons for 10th and 17th January.

3 See the lesson for 10th February.

4 See the lesson for 28th July.

The Danish Royal Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Antiquities' collection was a jumble of human artefacts (tools, weapons, ornaments and so on). Thomsen's job was to find a classification system that would bring some order to all this. He decided on a broad classification of three historic periods which he called Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. I expect you have heard these terms and perhaps you have wondered why things made of stone would be classified as older than things made of bronze and so on.

We often hear that “prehistoric” people used stone tools for over two million years before they learned how to find and use metal. Then they began using bronze, and iron only came later. But how does this compare with what the Bible tells us? The Bible contains a written record of the creation of the world, the approximate date on which that took place and what happened afterwards in the book of Genesis. “Prehistoric” means “before human testimony” or “before written records” and in reality there probably never was such a time! We can assume that Noah put the careful records that make up the genealogies of the pre-flood patriarchs into the ark. Even before the flood there were workers in metal – both brass (bronze) and iron – in Genesis 4.

When Thomsen's successor at the Danish Museum went digging in Irish peat bogs to look for ancient artefacts he found that things were not as clear cut as Thomsen's classification would suggest. Tools made of stone, iron and bronze were found mixed up together. However, the terms had stuck and you will still hear them today.

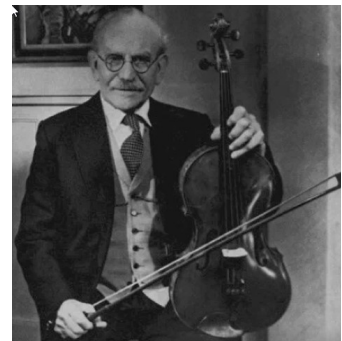
So next time you hear the term “stone age” pause and ask yourself what is meant. More than likely it is being applied to some poor group of people who were struggling to survive in the harsh conditions after the flood – people whose forebears had once had a more prosperous way of life.

Something to do

How would you classify objects in a museum? Thomsen was trying to determine the age of his artefacts by what they were made of but age is not the only way to classify things in a museum. If you began your own museum collection on 12 July when we looked at Sir Ashton Lever's museum, you could create your own catalogue today.

Something to listen to

We have had a lesson about famous violins this month⁵ and also (back in April⁶) about the string quartet – two violins, a viola and a 'cello playing together – but today we will look especially at the viola because it is the anniversary of the birth of a very famous viola player: Lionel Tertis (1876-1975) was born on 29th December.



The viola is smaller than the 'cello and larger than the violin and in Tertis's day it was something of a Cinderella of the orchestral string section. Although essential to the sound of the strings it was thought of as a second-rate violin, playable by violinists who could not quite make it to the top rank. Tertis changed all this by his advocacy for the instrument and his lyrical playing. He also commissioned composers such as William Walton to write solo works for the viola. He did something else too.

In Tertis's day the viola was not really standardised in size. Because it has to be held under the chin like a violin and yet play low notes there has to be a compromise. Too small and the instrument will not have a good sound; too large and the player will not be able to play it! The optimum size gives

5 Lesson for 18th December.

6 Lesson for the 1st April.

the best sound and ease of playing but in Tertis day the viola was still not capable of carrying over a full orchestra like a violin. Tertis preferred a large viola because of the rich sound it gave. You can see the size of his viola in the picture. The viola in this picture is one by an Italian maker of the eighteenth century which he bought in Paris. He wrote:

[it was] shown to me in an unplayable condition, without bridge, strings or fingerboard.... No case was available – it was such a large instrument 17 1/8 inches [about 43.5cm] – so my wife came to the rescue by wrapping it in her waterproof coat, and that is how it was taken across the English Channel.

Tertis had the wrecked instrument repaired and played it. However, such a long instrument would be unacceptable for many players so Tertis started working with string instrument maker, Arthur Richardson. Together they developed a thicker viola with a wider lower bouts (bottom section of the viola) and narrower upper bouts that enabled the player to access the higher register with ease. This instrument had a more powerful sound. Find a recording of William Walton's viola concerto⁷ or for a shorter demonstration of the tone of a Tertis viola you could listen to part of another piece Tertis commissioned, York Bowen's Viola sonata.⁸

7 Recording available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkoXjZCIB0E>

8 Recording available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpXLRHp3p9s&t=88s>