

28th February

Memory Verse:

Gather my saints together unto me;
those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Psalm 50:5

This verse explains to us who are God's saints. Jesus Christ is our sacrifice if we are Christians and so we are saints! More details tomorrow.

An African story

Get your atlas out and find the places as we go along! When you have read the story see if you can draw a map of Africa (It looks rather like the ear of an elephant!) and mark on the places in the story. If you have any connections with or information on missionaries serving in Africa you might like to mark their locations on the map too.

Cancer is a horrible disease and never more so than when it affects children. Denis Parsons Burkitt (1911-1993), an Irish surgeon and medical researcher, was born on 28th February. His discoveries while serving as a medical missionary in Africa resulted in the identification of what is now called Burkitt's Lymphoma, a cancer that usually attacks children and is often associated, as Denis Burkitt was the first to notice, with malaria.

Denis Burkitt did not originally intend to work in the field of medicine. The young Denis chose to become an engineering student having no particular empathy for any other discipline. "I had decided to follow any career but medicine and entered the engineering school, more because my father had been a civil engineer than from any sense of vocation," he wrote. He did not do well in engineering and his father was warned by a friend who was a tutor of Denis's that he was likely to fail his exams. During that difficult first year a senior student came up to Denis and invited him to a Christian group known as "No. 40" that met in the college. He went and his life changed completely. He later wrote:

I became a faltering follower of Christ and identified myself whole heartedly, with the Christian union. This gave me a sense of identity, a new confidence, and the assurance that God cared for individuals, I prayed about my future and began to feel totally convinced that I should abandon an engineering career and take up medicine.

Denis Burkitt did well in his medical studies. He felt a real call to go to Africa but the colonial service rejected him, citing the fact that he had only one eye, having lost one in a childhood accident. "...[W]hen I eventually reached Africa, God, in his mercy enabled me with my one eye to see things which my predecessors had missed with two" he commented. He did other medical work and then went to Africa as an army doctor. Here he organised Bible studies for the soldiers and found a love and sympathy for African Christians.

After the Second World War he applied to go Africa again and this time the colonial service accepted him, sending him to work in Uganda at first in a remote area and then in Kampala, the capital. It was in 1957 that Denis Burkitt noticed several children with fast-spreading tumours in the head and neck. These children died within weeks. He searched the hospital records of similar cases and he realised that they were all suffering from the same previously undescribed type of cancer characterized by infiltration of the affected tissues by lymphocytes – white blood cells that have left the bloodstream and migrated towards the tumour.

Denis Burkitt had already carried out geographical surveys relating to another disease and now he used a similar technique to try to get to the bottom of what was causing the tumours. He and some

colleagues went on a 10,000 mile Safari, trekking through Uganda, Kenya, Tan-ganyika, (Tanzania) Rhodesia, (Zimbabwe) Nyasaland, (Malawi) Mozambique, Swaziland (Eswatini) and the Transvaal (now part of South Africa) to map the incidence of the disease. The picture below shows Lake Victoria in Uganda where the disease is very prevalent. In this pioneering study Denis Burkitt and his colleagues found that the tumours occurred frequently in areas where Malaria was prevalent. Although similar tumours occur in children throughout the world they are much less common where there is no Malaria.



Denis Burkitt went on to gain an understanding of the link between Malaria and the tumours and to develop successful chemotherapy treatments for them. Nowadays if a child develops Burkitt's Lymphoma (as the disease is now called) in a wealthy western nation such as ours he has a very good prospect of complete recovery thanks to Denis Burkitt's work. Not so sadly in Africa where poverty leads to poor nutrition and lack of availability of the necessary drugs. Children in Africa who develop the disease still usually die.

Denis Burkitt was also a pioneer in the recognition of the importance of dietary fibre. Again Africa was the key as studies were carried out comparing the incidence of various diseases in prisoners in South Africa. Different ethnic groups had different diets with different amounts of fibre and a link with diseases was discernable. Unlike Burkitt's Lymphoma, the problems caused by too little dietary fibre affect wealthy western nations far more than they affect Africa.

Denis Burkitt was a native of Ireland. The Irish School of Medicine was largely founded by Robert Graves (1796-1853) and William Stokes (1804-1878). "Excellent clinicians, teachers and astute observers, they were both influenced by the revival of Christian Evangel[ical]ism of that period and they saw medicine and the treatment of the poor as a divine calling."¹ Denis Burkitt was in the same mould.

Words

Do you know what a dord is? If you have printed this page write your answer on the space below before you look at the next one. If you don't know have a guess – you can make more than one suggestion! If you have not printed the page get a piece of paper and write your answers and suggestions down there. No cheating by looking at the next page though!

A dord is _____.

On 28th February 1939 an editor working for the publisher G. and C. Merriam was looking through the second edition of Merriam's *Webster's New International Dictionary* which is an American



¹ Davis Coakley "Denis Burkitt and his contribution to haematology/oncology" *British Journal of Haematology*, 135, 17–25

Dictionary of the English language. He noticed a mistake in the entry “Dord”. Every entry in the dictionary included a small explanation of the word's origin and development, an *etymology*. The article for “Dord” was missing the etymology. The editor began to investigate.

Every good dictionary has specialist editors for various subjects. It turned out that the dictionary's chemistry editor had handed in a slip of paper with the instruction “D or d, cont./density.” on it. This meant that an addition was needed in the second edition of the dictionary to the list of things that the simple letter *D* in upper or lower case could stand for. In chemistry *D* can stand for “density”. The slip had been typed and it looked a bit like this:

D o r d, c o n t . / d e n s i t y

This had been mistaken for a new entry for a word “Dord”. So it had been inserted into the second edition of the dictionary like this:

dord (dôrd), *n.* *Physics & Chem.* Density

The word “dord” does not exist in English² but it had crept into the dictionary!

Now it is your turn! See if you can invent some words. Write them down with their meanings. Now look up your words in a good dictionary. Did they really exist after all?

2 It does exist in other languages including Irish where it means a bronze horn.