

June 26th

Memory verse

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. Genesis 8:22

A poem to read

On the side of this ancient house in Hamelin, Germany is an inscription which reads:

A.D. 1284 - on the 26th of June – the day of St. John and St. Paul – 130 children – born in Hamelin – were led out of the town by a piper wearing multicoloured clothes. After passing the Calvary near the Koppenberg they disappeared forever.



Thus originates the strange tale of the pied piper of Hamelin. It is best known from the poetic retelling of Robert Browning which is a superb poem to read aloud with plenty of opportunity for dramatic and expressive work. I have put it in today's optional resources files. Read it and make sure you understand all the words, although it is not difficult especially if someone reads it out loud to you and reads it well. A group of younger children might enjoy acting out the various scenes while it is read. Another option would be to have different children read the various speeches in the poem. I have highlighted these to make it easier. As an evacuee during World War my mother was given the task of learning the cripple boy's speech for an entertainment where presumably the poem was done in this way, perhaps with costumes. She used to repeat much of the rest of the poem too so I think she must have listened to a lot of rehearsals!

If you look at an atlas you will be able to find Hamelin and the River Weser. The town clock still commemorates the event with a chime of bells and moving figures that play out the story. The original clock was destroyed during the Second World War but it has been replaced by a new one which gives a very pretty rendering of the tale.¹



But however did such a story start? The earliest versions, interestingly do not mention the rats so graphically described by Browning at all, as you will notice from the translation of the inscription above. There is no agreement on the date either although the oldest sources give June 26th 1284. An



entry in Hamelin's town records notes in 1384, "It is 100 years since our children left." Some have linked the children's disappearance to the fact that this date is around the summer solstice when pagan bonfires were lit on hills in Germany. Other's have suggested that the luring away of children to fight in the children's crusade is the basis for the tale, although this was much earlier in 1212. Some scholars link it with mass migrations to other parts of Germany or Denmark and research into surnames in the area has given this some support. But whatever the origin of the story it is certainly a fascinating one and the moral of Browning's poem – always keep a bargain – is a good one.

If you began a poetry memorisation programme on 5th January (if not look at that lesson and begin

¹ You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xe540Eizjnk>

one now) you could include it. Although it is quite long it is not difficult because the story line helps the memory.

The picture above is by Kate Greenaway about whom we learned in the lesson for 17th March.²

A letter to Read from History

One of the ways historian can find out about the past is through letters which survive. We are fortunate to have a collection of the letters of Jan Huss (1370-1415), for instance, including one dated 26th June 1415. These enable us to get a picture of the man and his relationship with his fellow Bohemian Christians and with those who opposed him. We have had a number of lessons that mention Jan Huss: he comes up on May 2nd, May 23rd and also a few days ago on June 21st and we will encounter him again on July 16th. The picture on the right shows the monument in the city of Constance on the spot where he met his death.³ But who exactly was he and what did he do?



Huss was one of those men like Wycliffe⁴ and Savonarola⁵ who, ahead of their time as it were, challenged some of the core errors of the Roman Catholic church. Inspired by the teachings of Wycliffe he spread the Gospel all over his native Bohemia. This challenge to the Roman Catholic church of his day did not go unanswered and he was tried at the Council of Constance and condemned to death. His story is given in full in today's Optional Resources files.

Below is an extract from the letter which bears today's date and was written while Huss was being held in Constance. It relates some of the events of his trial. Notice the tactics of those who opposed him. They refused to hear his arguments. Whenever he asked them to point out what he had written that was supposed to be wrong, they deflected from the issue or resorted to insults or bare declamations of their superior knowledge. This sidestepped the need to refute his arguments. Huss was a very able man and clearly an excellent debater. They would have found it impossible to refute him in debate. They therefore take care not to enter into any debate with him. There is an interesting lesson for us here because this tactic of refusing logical debate is very common among those who oppose the Gospel today. Examples of modern day practitioners of this technique include Richard Dawkins who even says, "Scientists should not debate [with] creationists."⁶ In the end, the Biblical position always "wins" a debate because God's Word is truth. Engaging in debate with truth is likely to lead to defeat. Watch out for this tactic as you read through the extract from the letter.

LXXVI.

To the Faithful Bohemians (June 26, 1415)

Master John Hus, a servant of God in hope, to all the faithful Bohemians who love and will love God, sendeth his earnest desires and unprofitable prayers that they may both live and die in the grace of God and dwell with God for ever.

Faithful and beloved in God! This likewise I have determined to write that you may know that the

² You can see the full poem with her illustrations here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18343/18343-h/18343-h.htm>

³ Gortyna, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

⁴ Lessons for February 1st, May 22nd and June 10th.

⁵ Lesson for 23rd May.

⁶ <https://richarddawkins.net/2014/01/why-bill-nye-shouldnt-debate-ken-ham>

Council—proud, avaricious, and defiled with every crime—hath condemned my Czech books, which it hath never either seen nor heard read, and if it had listened with all its power, would never have understood for there were present at the Council Frenchmen, Italians, Britons, Spaniards, Germans, and other people of different nationalities....

I tell you that as soon as I took my stand in the Council and saw there was no proper discipline there, I shouted out with a loud voice, amid general silence, “I thought there would be more reverence, piety, and discipline in this Council.”

Then the presiding Cardinal said, “What do you say? You spoke more humbly in the castle.”

“Yes,” I replied, “because there was no one there to shout me down; but here every one is crying out.”

...They would not contend against me with the Scriptures, as those noble lords heard, who took a brave stand on the side of God's truth, and were ready to suffer every shame, Bohemians, Moravians, and Poles, especially Baron Wenzel de Duba and Baron John of Chlum, for the latter were standing near. Sigismund brought them into the Council, and they heard me say, “If I have written anything wrong, I wish to be told of it.”

Whereupon the presiding Cardinal said, “As you want information, take this: you should retract and obey the decision of fifty doctors of the church.” A wonderful piece of information!...

I am writing this to you that you may know that they did not get the better of me by any scripture passage or any arguments; but strove to do so by means of guile and threats so as to induce me to recant and abjure. But God in His mercy, Whose gospel I have spread abroad, was with, me and is



still; yea, and will be, I trust, to life's end, and will keep me in His grace unto death. ...⁷

⁷ Picture above is of Constance today.