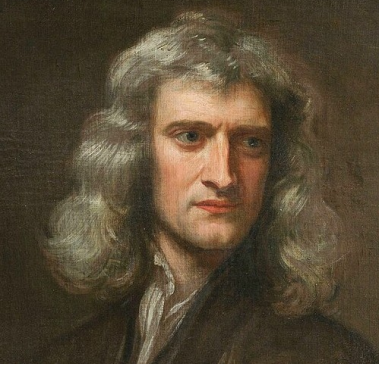


19th March

Memory verse

Today you can have a memory verse revision session. We did this before on 1st January but if you did not do these lessons last year perhaps you did not have anything to revise then. How many of your verses can you still remember? Have you made a giant memory verse wall chart? If not today's the day to start one. See 1st January's lesson for ideas.

A story from history to read¹



On 19th March 1696, Charles Montague, Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote to the scientist Isaac Newton (1642-1727) telling him that the king had granted him the job of Warden of the Royal Mint. The Royal Mint is where all our coins and bank notes are made. We will be learning about Sir Isaac Newton in the lesson for 5th July. For now though, we can just note that he was one of greatest scientists and mathematicians that has ever lived and he was also a Christian. In those days the Royal Mint was based at the Tower of London.

Corruption and bribery were common in public life in those days. How would Isaac Newton fare as a Christian in such an environment as the Mint? Newton is said to have been offered a bribe of £6000 in connection with the contract for the manufacture of copper coins. He did not take it.

At this time the Royal Mint had a great need for competent and ruthlessly honest management. It was in the throes of re-coining the old silver coins that dated back beyond the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. When that enormous operation was over, Newton devoted his time to battling with the counterfeiters and clippers who were forging and debasing the coinage. Counterfeiters make fake coins and clippers cut a little of the gold off the real coins and kept it before passing the coins on. Newton interviewed criminals and informers himself and hundreds of draft letters and reports still exist in his handwriting in the Royal Mint Archives.

Newton wanted the coinage to be as uniform in weight and composition as possible and he achieved a great improvement in the accuracy of the coins. Then, as now, coinage was subject to the annual Trial of the Pyx,² and he was very angry when in 1710 the jury at this trial mistakenly declared his gold coins to be substandard. In fact, this was not the case and the Mint greatly benefited from having a man who was not only one of the best minds ever but also honest in charge of its operations.

Something to listen to³

Have you ever heard someone playing the 'cello? The composer Anton Dvorak, (1841-1904) wrote:

The cello is a beautiful instrument, but its place is in the orchestra and in chamber music. As a solo instrument it isn't much good... it whinges up above, and grumbles down below.

- 1 Information from <https://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/journal/people/isaac-newton/> and other sources. Illustration of Leo Stern: By Sophie Stern - Royal College of Music, London, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=49978070>
- 2 This fascinating legal procedure is described here: <https://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/journal/history/trial-of-the-pyx/>.
- 3 Information and quotations from <https://interlude.hk/on-this-day-19-march-dvorak-cello-concerto-in-b-minor-was-premiered/> and other sources.

Which was an odd thing to say as he later went on to write the most beautiful 'cello concerto that has become one of the best loved and widely performed works for the instrument. Even when working on the concerto Dvorak seems to have been rather bemused that he'd even contemplated composing such a thing. He wrote to a friend:

I've just finished the first movement of a concerto for cello! Don't be surprised; I was surprised myself, and I still wonder why I chose to embark upon something like that.

If you did the lesson earlier this month about Mendelssohn's violin concerto you will know just what a concerto is.⁴ A 'cello concerto is a piece of music for 'cello and orchestra in which the 'cello is accompanied by, and dialogues with, the orchestra.

We will be looking at Dvorak and his music in more detail in the lesson for 1st May so I won't spoil things by anticipating and telling you about his life here. His 'cello concerto was first performed in London on 19th March 1896. A London music journalist at the concert was very impressed. He wrote:

In wealth and beauty of thematic material, as well as in the unusual interest of the development of the first movement, the new concerto yields to none of the composer's recent works; all three movements are richly melodious, the just balance is maintained between the orchestra and the solo instruments, and the passages written for display are admirably devised... Mr. Leo Stern played the solo part with good taste, musical expression, and faultless technical skill, and the work was received with much enthusiasm.

Whatever Dvorak once thought about the 'cello he had clearly changed his mind!

Leo Stern (1862-1904), pictured on the right, was a favourite 'cellist of Queen Victoria before whom he was often asked to play. The portrait was painted by his daughter. You can enjoy the birthday of this wonderful piece of music by finding a recording⁵ of any one of the movements and listening to it. If you like to have something to do while listening rather than just sitting back and closing your eyes, get a piece of paper and doodle or sketch while you take in the music.



Something to think about⁶

Do you know what Social Science is?

Here is a definition from the Academy of Social Sciences in London:

Social science is the study of people: as individuals, communities and societies; their behaviours and interactions with each other and with their built, technological and natural environments. Social science seeks to understand the evolving human systems across our increasingly complex world and how our planet can be more sustainably managed. It's vital to our shared future.

and it adds:

⁴ See the lesson for 13th March.

⁵ There is a good recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=190faUQ7xJg&t=1355s>

⁶ Information from <https://crev.info/2023/04/social-scientists-ashamed/> and other sources.

We believe in the power of social science to advance understanding of our contemporary human world and to shape a better future.

Social scientists come from three main disciplines, sociology (the study of human society), anthropology (the study of people throughout the world, their behaviour and evolutionary history), and psychology (the study of the mind and behaviour). Did you notice that I highlighted the word future? Social scientists aim to work out what is going to happen in the future and governments look to them to help make policy. This is what is meant by “shape a better future” in the quotation above. Just how good are social scientists at doing this? Three social scientists carried out a study to find out the answer to this question which was published on 19th March 2023.

The three senior social scientists from different universities across the USA used the covid 19 pandemic as an opportunity to measure the correctness of the predictions of their colleagues. At the beginning of the pandemic they asked social scientists for quick guesses as to how society would react. Then as the pandemic unfolded, they asked 100 teams of social scientists to give their forecasts each month. This was then tabulated and compared to what actually happened. Here is how they described the result of their study:

...we found that experts’ predictions were generally no more accurate than those made by samples of the general public. Further, their predictions were often worse than predictions generated by simple statistical models.

In other words social scientists, despite their training, had no more ability in the discipline in which they professed to be experts than ordinary untrained members of the public. They were false prophets.

Did you notice in the quotation defining social science that begins this section the words “evolving human systems?” False evolutionary theory underlies all the disciplines that make up social science and if you start from the wrong premise you will reach the wrong conclusion.

The Bible has much to say about those who make false predictions or prophecies and we will be looking at this issue in more detail in the lesson for 2nd October. How can we tell if someone's prophecies are false? A true prophet’s words will be fulfilled (Deuteronomy 18:21–22; Jeremiah 28:8–9). We had a memory verse early last month that tells us what we should do when we hear predictions that frighten us? Did you learn Psalm 46:2-3?

Something to look at⁷

March 19th was the birthday of Swiss artist Léo-Paul Robert (1851-1923). Léo-Paul Robert painted many lovely pictures of birds which became a speciality of his in later life. This beautiful illustration of a whinchat is typical of his delicate and detailed style. But Léo-Paul Robert did not only paint birds. Earlier in his career, he painted some murals in important public buildings in Bern, the capital of Switzerland. In the Swiss Supreme Court building in Lausanne there is one of his most interesting pictures. Every day the judges in the court have to pass the painting which is called *Justice Instructing the Judges*. You can see the painting on the next page.



⁷ Illustration of painting from Supreme Court Lausanne (below): Permission sought by email from info@mauckbaker.com 03/03/22.



What does the artist depict in this painting? He is showing what is the foundation of the Swiss legal system.

The whole Reformation system of law was built on the fact that God had revealed something real down into the common things of life.... Down in the foreground of the large mural the artist depicts many sorts of litigation – the wife against the husband, the architect against the builder, and so on. How are the judges going to judge between them? This is the way we judge in a Reformation country, says [Léo-]Paul Robert. He has portrayed Justice pointing with her sword to a book upon which are the words, “The Law of God.” For Reformation man there was a basis for law...⁸

⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (1968).

Without the Bible, the Law of God, we have no foundation for any system of justice for who is to say what is right and what is wrong? Someone might say that right and wrong are just whatever is the majority view in a particular society at the time. However, we know instinctively that this cannot be correct. In Hitler's Germany the majority assented to the murder of Jews, Gypsies and handicapped people. Were they right? Only the Word of God can give a solid basis for distinguishing right and wrong and hence a basis for justice. At the Reformation, the discovery that the Bible is the only final authority had an amazing effect on the day to day lives of ordinary people. The greater the influence of Reformation ideas, the more freedom there was from injustice and from arbitrary government power.