

7th May

Memory Verse

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

Something to read aloud

Today's story comes from wartime Britain. It is also another story with a bicycle theme (see 22nd April) which should be an inspiration to any young cyclist!

During the bombing raids on London and other British cities in 1941 the National Fire Service was always busy. The German bombers dropped showers of incendiary (fire) bombs and often set whole streets alight.

Bootle is a town in Lancashire and on the night of **May 7th**, 1941, it had one of its heaviest raids and the Fire Service was out all over the town fighting fires.

Ronald Heys was a messenger boy for the service. He was sixteen years old and had the job of cycling through the blazing streets with messages between the Fire Service headquarters and the firemen on the pumps.



On this particular night he ran over a pile of splintered glass, his tyres were cut to ribbons and he was thrown off. He jumped up and ran on to deliver his message, carrying the useless bicycle, before going back to headquarters.

He changed his bicycle for another machine and was soon off again with another message. This time he ran into a heap of splintered wood and broke a wheel. Again he ran on to deliver his message and got back to headquarters in time to pick up his third bicycle and set off once more through the bombs and the fires.

There were explosions all round him and in the blackout he ran headlong into a newly-made bomb crater. This time it was not only his bicycle that was damaged. He crawled out of the crater bruised and cut about the knees and arms. Leaving his wrecked machine in the hole he trudged on with his message and back again to headquarters.

This time he was ordered to see a doctor, but the raid was still on and yet another message needed delivering. So on his fourth bicycle he rode off down the street – straight into the blast of a bomb that exploded nearby. He was knocked unconscious for a few minutes but his bicycle was still serviceable. So when he had recovered his senses he tried to ride on with his message. The bicycle was all right but his leg was badly hurt. He knew that the men at the fires were waiting for his message, so pushing his machine he limped to the pumps and back again to headquarters.

“Any more messages, sir?” he asked the officer in charge. This time the officer insisted on a visit to the doctor. He had taken his last message that night! Later in the year Ronald Heys was awarded the British Empire Medal for his bravery.¹

¹ This story is preserved in Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today* Vol. 2, (Oxford, 1967) pp.16-17. The London Fire Service Museum has information about firefighting during the Blitz:
<https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/museum/history-and-stories/firefighters-of-the-second-world-war>

Something to find out and something to check

I am not only impressed by Ronald's heroism – I'm also impressed by whoever was in charge of Bootle's Fire Service bicycle maintenance! Bikes used for this service would have to be kept in first rate working order and every night of air raid would have meant potential serious damage to and destruction of machines. Do you know how a bicycle works? Find out from an encyclopedia or other book.² Do you know how to look after your own bike if you have one?³

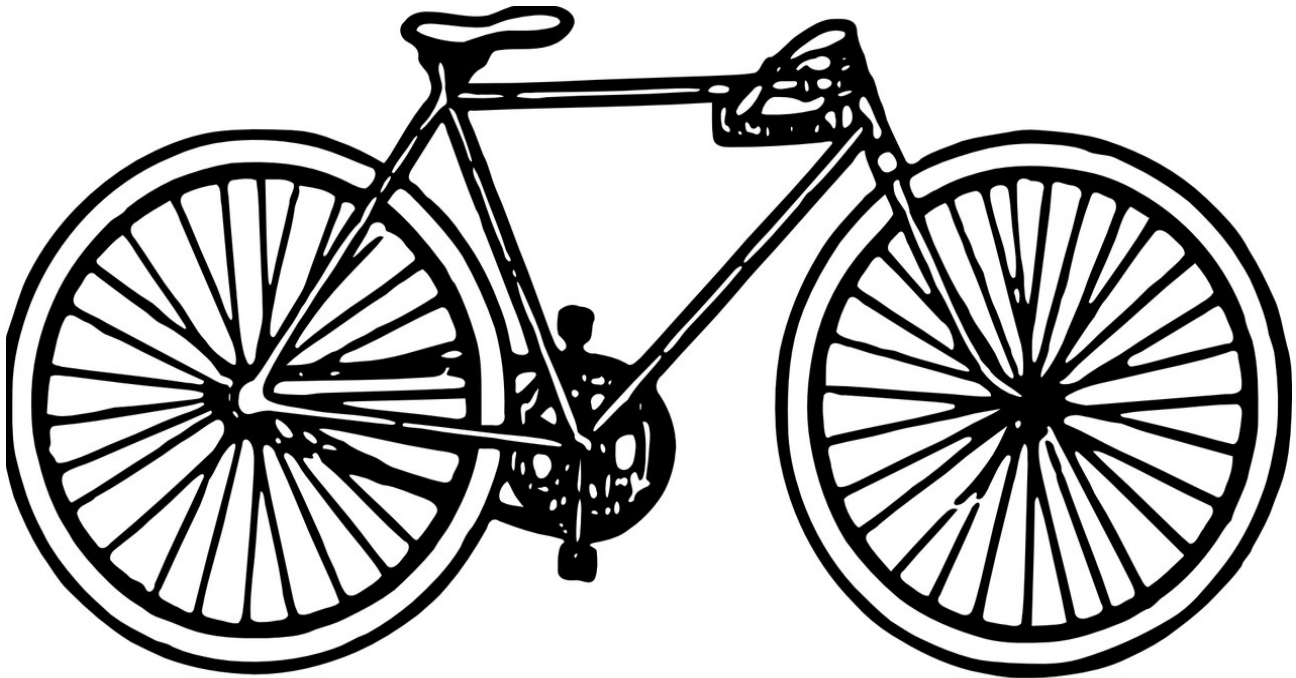
Find out

Where is your local fire station?

Does your area have “retained” firefighters? These are people who do a normal job of work but are on call for the fire service if needed. They are paged by the service if there is a fire and go at once to the fire station. They normally have to be people who live or work within five minutes of the fire station.⁴

Something to draw

A side on drawing of a bike like the one below might be easy. If you want to draw a bike in perspective the wheels are quite tricky.⁵



Map work

Find **Bootle** on a map. Of which big city is it a suburb? Why was that city (and therefore Bootle) a particular target for German bombs?

² There is a good description here: here: <https://blog.pitsco.com/blog/how-do-bicycles-work-the-science-behind-this-simple-machine>

³ Some ideas here:

https://www.frogbikes.co.uk/blog/bikes_maintenance_for_kids_how_to_keep_their_bikes_in_good_shape

⁴ This recruitment video explains how they operate. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiRRprRTGHc> You can see the kind of tests firemen have to be able to pass to do their job here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVHOxCJ6R1w>

⁵ There is a tutorial on how to draw wheels: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_YCL-FLbMA If you listen to the instructor's accent you'll hear he's from the same area as Ronald Heys!

For older children: something to think about and something to listen to⁶

On 7th May 1747 the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach visited Frederick the Great King of Prussia. What happened during that visit was a clash of philosophies that resulted in a great piece of music. The ins and outs of this event are complex and require some background knowledge which I have set out here. It is a fascinating story.

During Bach's lifetime there was a kind of thinking called **Rationalism**. This was not a Christian way of thinking, although, sadly, it did influence the church.

Rationalists thought that there were obvious truths from which we could work out solid conclusions about the world. They thought that you could begin with certain truths which are not confirmed by our senses or by what we can observe around us. They called these things “self evident”. From these truths (they thought) we can deduce the nature of the real world. Mathematics and geometry were their ideal or model for knowledge and the **rationalists** thought that you could be certain about what you know. This certainty was not based on revelation (e.g. the Bible) but could be worked out without it. **Rationalists** thought you could find out the truth about the world using human reason on its own.

The main rationalist philosophers were **Renee Descartes** (1596-1650) **Baruch Spinoza** (1632-1677), **Gottfried Leibnitz** (1646-1714). But starting from this point of view they came to very *different* conclusions about what the world is like! If they had arrived at the truth using reason they would, surely, all have come to the same conclusions.

The **Rationalist** movement came to be known by the term **Enlightenment** and the era of history which fell under its influence is often called “The Age of **Enlightenment**.”

In Germany the Enlightenment was called the **Aufklärung**. The **Aufklärung** movement had a particular emphasis: an interest in Biblical criticism. **Aufklärung** scholars insisted on testing the teaching of the Bible by their unaided reason. Very influential and closely contemporary with Bach was Hermann **Reimarus** (1694-1768) who wrote *Apology for or Defence of the Rational Worshipper of God* (1774). In his rational version of religion, there were no miracles and Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, just a rather mistaken man who failed to lead Israel out of Roman domination and got put to death for his pains.

From 1723 until the end of his life, Bach worked as Cantor⁷ of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. Here he often quarrelled with those who were in authority, sometimes about musical matters sometimes about unmusical matters. However, there was one issue which loomed large and was very disturbing for him.

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church of which Bach was a devout member and an employee, considered music to be the “handmaiden of theology”. He advocated what he called the “training of men toward God as a consequence of the practice of music to the glory of God.” In line with this one of the aims of the St. Thomas’ School when it was founded was “to guide the students through the euphony of music to the contemplation of the divine.”⁸ By Bach’s day such ideas were

6 Adapted from material on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive available from <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>. The sources for the content of this lesson are Greg Bahnsen, *The History of Western Philosophy* (a very useful course despite the Theonomy bias of the lecturer), Timothy A. Smith, “Was Bach a Rationalist, Pietist, Neither, or Both?” from the *Sojourn* Website and James Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason* (London, 2005)

7 Musical director.

8 Quoted in James Gaines *Evening in the Palace of Reason* (London, 2005) p.183.

beginning to seem very old fashioned but this was an aim with which Bach would have been greatly in sympathy. He took Luther's ideas very seriously, marking and commenting on them in the margin of his Bible, which was an edition which included Luther's comments. However, a Rector⁹ had been appointed to the school who thought Luther's ideas on this subject were nonsense. Johann August Ernesti was a disciple of the *Aufklärung* movement who thought that the Scriptures should be analysed in the same way as the ancient classical writings and who was firmly convinced by Reimarus' rationalist notions. He poured scorn on the musical aspects of the school's curriculum and it was not long before he and Bach were at loggerheads. Nothing could have been more opposite to Bach's attitude to the Bible, music and life itself than these Enlightenment ideas. For Bach the Bible was God's revelation to man, music was an expression of God's goodness and order, and life was to be lived to God's glory.

By this time too, Bach's music itself was coming to be considered rather old fashioned. More modern composers, in line with Enlightenment thinking which made man and his reason the measure of all things, considered that the job of music was only to please the listener. Bach's brilliance at counterpoint and especially his excellence at improvising canons and fugues on the spot began to be looked at as nothing more than a clever party trick. Instead composers advocated singing melodies with pleasing accompaniments. Bach had not had a university education and he began to be looked down on by composers who had studied the latest philosophical ideas, as though he was some kind of musical tradesman rather than an intellectual. With hindsight, of course, we can see that Bach had an intellect that left these now forgotten men completely in the shade but that was by no means obvious at the time. Bach's own son, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, a leading figure in the musical Enlightenment, began to eclipse his father in fashionable musical circles.

This is the background to Bach's visit in 1747 to the Court of Frederick the Great of Prussia in Potsdam. Frederick the Great was a powerful supporter of Enlightenment ideas and did not believe in any revealed religion. Carl Philip Emanuel Bach was Frederick's court composer.

At this time the piano was a very new musical instrument. Frederick had a large collection of these early pianos and he invited "old Bach" partly to demonstrate his (Bach's) skill at composition and improvisation on them.

When Bach arrived at court on 7th May, Frederick gave Bach a theme on which he was asked to improvise a three part fugue¹⁰ as a test of his abilities.



Frederick was quite a good flute player but whether he was a good enough composer to have constructed a theme like this is doubtful. Most music scholars think that Carl Philip Emanuel must have given him at least some help – if did not write the whole thing himself. Bach must have been tired – he had had a long and gruelling journey from Leipzig and had not rested before coming to court. Nevertheless he duly improvised a three part fugue on the theme. It left the assembled musicians and rationalist thinkers (the philosopher Voltaire was probably present) very impressed with this “party trick” in the old fashioned musical style. Frederick, however, merely requested a second improvisation – this time in six parts. This Bach could *not* do on the spot and he had to tell

9 Headmaster

10 A piece of music for two or more voices or lines, built on a musical theme that is introduced at the beginning by the voices or parts coming in one after the other with the theme at different pitches. The theme continues to appear throughout the piece in different ways.

Frederick that a six-voiced fugue would require preparation. He returned home to Leipzig feeling humiliated. His own son had conspired to show him up in front of the king.

Bach did not leave the matter there. On his return he wrote his *Musical Offering* a collection of fugal and canonical¹¹ works on the Royal Theme and dedicated it to Frederick. The German word for offering (a very unusual word to use in the title of a musical composition) can mean also sacrifice or victim – and no doubt Bach felt that he had been Frederick’s “Musical Victim”. The music of the *Musical Offering* is not only incredibly complex and amazing intellectually, it is also staggeringly beautiful. And everything in it is a kind of musical answer to the insult that Bach felt had been offered to him by this ruler whose whole outlook was also an insult – to God. One commentator wrote:

[The *Musical Offering* was] a very clear statement from Bach: beware the appearance of good fortune, Frederick; stand in awe of a fate more fearful than any this world has to give; seek the glory beyond the glory of this fallen world; and know that there is a law higher than any king's by which you and every one of us will be judged. Of course that is what he said. He had been saying it all his life.¹²

It is doubtful if Frederick ever bothered to have this wonderful music performed but that would probably not have worried Bach. His music ultimately was not written for men; it was *Soli Deo Gloria* - for the glory of God alone.

Find a recording of one of the movements of this composition and listen for yourself.¹³

11 A musical canon is a more complicated form of round.

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/jan/14/classicalmusicandopera.jsbach>

13 For example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23yNGer9Wqs>