

## TRIVIAL MATTERS

### *Alfred Williams links beards, the Republican Party and the Church*

Startling evidence of Papal innumeracy is provided by the fact that, despite the existence of Popes John I-XIX, and Popes John XXI-XXIII, there was never a Pope John XX. To make up for this there have been two separate Popes Victor IV, although both were 'anti-popes' - rogue Popes, illegitimately elected in opposition to the true Pope. Indeed, between 1409 and 1429 there were three different men all simultaneously claiming to be the true Pope.

Moving down the scale to archbishops, despite the fact that the first archbishop of Canterbury was appointed in 597, and the first president of Colombia took office in 1819, giving the archbishops a head start of 1,222 years, there have been more holders of the latter post than the former.

The first president of Chile was the great Chilean nationalist Bernardo O'Higgins, whose surname betrayed his father's Irish origins. This linguistic oddity finds a neat reversal in Eamon de Valera, the Irish nationalist with a Spanish father and surname.

No president of the USA has had a beard since 1893, when Benjamin Harrison left office, and only four bearded men have ever been elected, all Republicans.

During the office of the first bearded President, Abraham Lincoln, the Circle Line of the London Underground was opened (1863). The longest alliterative journey you can take on the Circle Line is a mere two stops (Sloane Square

to South Kensington). Expansion of the Underground has made a 6-stop alliterative journey possible at the western end of the Piccadilly Line (Hounslow East, Hounslow Central, Hounslow West, Hatton Cross, and two stops at Heathrow).

There is only one stop on the tube map which contains none of the letters in the word 'mackerel' - St. John's Wood. There are, however, three such national capitals - Quito (Ecuador), Tunis (Tunisia), and Djibouti (Djibouti).

***"There is only one stop on the tube map which contains none of the letters in the word 'mackerel' - St. John's Wood"***

The fish (not exclusively mackerel) was taken up as a symbol by early Christians because of its acrostic properties in Greek (Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς θεοῦ υἱὸς Σωτῆρ - Jesus Christ, God's son, saviour).

Early Christians were not popular with the fiercely pagan Emperor, Julian the Apostate (reigned 360-363), although his opinions on fish are unclear. Beards, however, clearly upset him, as amongst his surviving writings is the *Misopogon*, which translates as 'the Beard-Hater', and has never been popular in the American Republican party.

The Roman title Caesar lived on in the German Kaiser, and the Russian Czar. It is, however, unlikely that Czar Peter the Great's illegalisation of beards, a startling move given that shaving had only been legalized in his father's reign, owed anything to Julian's work. However, like Julian, it was fiercely opposed by the church, which considered shaving a mortal sin.



## ARS MAGNA

### *The Great Art of the Cryptic Crossword, by Snufkin*

When a student says his subject is mathematics, the response is almost always "Oh, I never could do Maths." The same goes for cryptic crosswords. There seems to be a widespread assumption that the world of the crossword - of cruciverbalism, as it is affectionately known - is open only to a small coterie of devoted enthusiasts who were somehow *born* with the requisite ability. In fact, all that's required is a good vocabulary and an agile mind; a fair proportion of students here should fit the bill, so at least for Oxford students the barrier is more a matter of psychology than of ability. My aim here is to bring out the cruciverbalist in those who find themselves intrigued, but baffled, by cryptic crosswords.

Before I begin in earnest, I should address an important worry: why bother? Isn't life too short to be frittered away on such a trivial pursuit? This sort of worry is difficult to dispel, because there is very little tangible benefit to be had from solving problems that don't need to be solved. Certainly, crossword-solving is a good way of increasing your vocabulary; but then, so is reading literature or thumbing through a dictionary. Sometimes it is cited as a good way of postponing the onset of senility; but then, neural atrophy cannot be imminent even for the least conscientious of students. So neither of the standard attempts to give the activity a pragmatic justification is successful.

Once this is understood, the worry can be given a straightforward answer. There's no reason why anyone *should* do crosswords, any more than there is a reason why anyone *should* listen to music, or play football, or go clubbing. The point is that these might be enjoyable ways of spending time. If, after working through some of the examples in this article, and perhaps having a go at the crossword printed on page 31, you can't see why anyone would want to put themselves through such mental torture, then fair enough: crosswords just aren't your thing. But if discovering the answers to cryptic clues proves to be strangely satisfying, then that sense of satisfaction is justification enough.

With that, we can begin. The clues in a cryptic crossword come in various different types, and a substantial part of the battle is over once you know what sort of clue you're dealing with. In most clues, there are two entirely separate ways of arriving at the answer; in such cases, the clue usually falls into two parts - one of them being the definition of the answer. (A side effect of this is that once you get the hang of spotting which clues are which, cryptic crosswords can be easier than non-cryptics: in both cases there is a definition, but only in a cryptic is there an alternative route. That explains how what may look like a complicated vocab test can in fact increase your vocabulary.) We'll look at each of the chief types of clue in turn, using examples taken from some of my recent *Cherwell* crosswords, as well as a couple of well-known classics.

Perhaps the simplest type of all is the **double definition**. Here, the two ways of solving the clue are both definitions of the answer - different definitions, of course. What makes these clues cryptic is that the two definitions are not visibly separated, and the resulting phrase is usually misleading.

1. *Test pilot* (5)

This clue is designed to make you think of intrepid men in their flying machines. But you must be on your guard: in this world, nothing is quite as it seems. If a thought comes to you naturally, it is almost certainly what the evil demon behind the clue *wanted* you to think. (We aim to mislead.) This clue is easily identified as a double definition; the fact that it consists of just two words is a dead giveaway. So, we want a five-letter word meaning test and pilot. If you're stuck, reach for a thesaurus. Five-letter matches for 'test' might be CHECK, ESSAY, FINAL, PROOF and TRIAL. Does 'pilot' fit with any of these? Yes - think of a pilot project or a pilot episode, and TRIAL fits the bill.

Another simple type is the **cryptic definition**, which provides a perfect illustration of the difference between 'simple' and 'easy'. A cryptic definition is just that: a definition of the answer, put in a most misleading fashion. As they rely on sheer ingenuity, rather than conventional rules, they can be solved even by people who know nothing

about crosswords. Here are two classic examples:

2. *Jammed cylinder* (5,4)

3. *Die of cold* (3,4)

The jammed cylinder in question is not a clogged-up gun barrel; it is a cylindrical object which is full of jam - in other words, a SWISS ROLL. Likewise, Clue 3 has nothing to do with hypothermia; the answer is a die, a small cube, which is made of cold stuff - in other words, an ICE CUBE.

These clues can be the hardest to solve, but also the most satisfying when the penny drops. They are also hard to think up, from the setter's point of view, and so are comparatively rare. As a final example, here's one of mine:

4. *One wouldn't want to go out with this* (11)

Nothing to do with embarrassing items of clothing; the answer is AGORAPHOBIA.

*"My aim is to bring out the cruciverbalist in those who are intrigued, but baffled, by cryptic crosswords"*

The clues most likely to make you kick yourself are those with **hidden words**. These are a tiny bit more complicated than our first two types, because there is an indicator to tell you that the clue is of the hidden-word variety. Common indicators include 'some', 'part of', and 'hidden in'.

5. *Ebb and flow observed in fetid estuaries* (5)

A rather unpleasant clue, that one; I don't know what came over me. Perhaps it was the influence of the TIDES. Here's a more tasteful example:

6. *Moisten meat in Cuba stew* (5)

Note that the indicator here is an understated 'in', giving BASTE as the hidden word. Finally, the following clue is a classic, containing the longest known hidden phrase.

7. *Some job at hand? We'll soon see* (4,3,5)

This gem was written by Brian Greer, the previous editor of the Times crossword. It's a good example because it introduces a standard deception in cryptic crosswords: that innocent-looking word 'see'. A see (from the Latin sedes, a seat) is a diocese, the jurisdiction of a bishop. The most common see found in crosswords is Ely, a cathedral city in Cambridgeshire, which is useful for clueing words which end in -ely. Here, though, we're looking at BATH AND WELLS.

The last of the simple clue types is the **anagram**, which occurs five or six times in the average cryptic crossword. As with hidden words, the clue type is signalled by an indicator; but the variety of indicators for anagrams can be rather overwhelming. Usually they involve movement or some kind of diseased state, showing that the letters are not in the right order. Here's an example:

8. *Labs are to recast instrument* (9)

The indicator here is 'recast'. If you suspect that the clue might be an anagram, start counting letters. We want nine,

which neatly corresponds to the number of letters in ‘labs are to’. Write the letters down - some people find it easier if they’re written in a circle - and stare at them for a while, and you might just come up with ASTROLABE, an instrument for measuring the altitudes of stars. Of course, this clue would be easier as part of a whole crossword, where you might have had some letters from other answers (at best, A\_T\_O\_A\_E).

One anagram indicator to watch out for is ‘out’, which (like ‘see’) looks quite innocent:

9. *Cattle run out, afraid* (9)

There are nine letters in ‘cattle run’; with only a few vowels, it shouldn’t be too difficult to hit upon RELUCTANT. We’ll look at a final example to see another anagram indicator:

10. *Playing tennis - it’s demanding* (9)

Here the indicator is ‘playing’. Notice a vital point about punctuation: it is often misleading, and can usually be ignored. So our anagram letters are those in ‘tennis its’, giving INSISTENT.

So far the clues have all been simple, involving a single trick. But most words don’t give neat anagrams, or hide cunningly inside a meaningful phrase, or have two entirely separate definitions; and cryptic definitions are hard to come by. For these words, crossword setters will use **complex clues**, which build up the answer from its constituent letters. In doing so, they make use of abbreviations such as T for time, O for old, C for a hundred. Some of these abbreviations are common, some less so; but the important thing is that they will all be listed as abbreviations in the dictionary. (A brief note on dictionaries: for daily newspaper crosswords, a medium-sized dictionary like the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* or the *Collins English Dictionary* should be perfectly adequate. For more advanced puzzles, you will need the *Chambers Dictionary*.) So if you’re wondering “Ah! Perhaps ‘potato’ could mean P,” the chances are that you’re wrong.

11. *Outdo former church liberal* (5)

This illustrates a number of standard abbreviations. ‘Former’ = EX (not really an abbreviation, but a common element of these ‘bitty’ clues); ‘church’ = CE (as in Church of England; the other possibility for ‘church’ is CH); ‘liberal’ = L (or sometimes LIB). To outdo is to EXCEL.

The parts won’t always fit together in this straightforward order, and there may be anagrams involved as well. A good example of both is:

12. *Monster’s respectable at first in version of legend* (7)

‘Version of’ is an anagram indicator, so it looks like we have an anagram of ‘legend’ involved. But that will only give us six letters, leaving us with one to spare. “Monster’s respectable” doesn’t look much like a definition, so perhaps

our definition is just ‘Monster’. (Here “Monster’s” is a contraction of “Monster is”; ‘is’ provides a linking word between the two parts of the clue.) So our extra letter has to come from “respectable at first” - that is, R, the first letter of ‘respectable’. So we have an anagram of ‘legend’, with R *inside* it as indicated by the ‘in’. And indeed GRENDDEL fits the bill.

Finally, here’s one of my personal favourites:

13. *Peach that’s sliced beforehand* (5)

‘That’s’ is a contraction of ‘that is’, which is abbreviated to IE; ‘sliced’ gives CUT, which is to be written beforehand; and a peach, as well as being a fruit that might well be sliced, is (to quote my dictionary) “an attractive young woman” - in other words, a CUTIE. What I like about the clue is the fact that it makes perfect sense on its own, and is perfectly misleading.

We’ve only scratched the surface of the world of cruciverbals, and there is much more to be said. For those who would like to read more on the subject, I strongly recommend the *Chambers Crossword Manual* by Don Manley: it’s clearly written, full of useful information and practice puzzles, and only costs £7.

But the best way of getting better at crosswords is to do them regularly. Get into the habit of having a stab at the crossword when you pick up a newspaper. The *Times* crossword is the golden standard: it’s always high quality, and never unfair. The *Telegraph* is much easier to break into, but not nearly as satisfying. The *Guardian* is the panacea of the crossword world, a no holds barred free-for-all with little respect for conventions; this gives it some character at the expense of fairness. I suggest that you leave it well alone until you’re happy with normal cryptic clues, because otherwise it will just confuse.

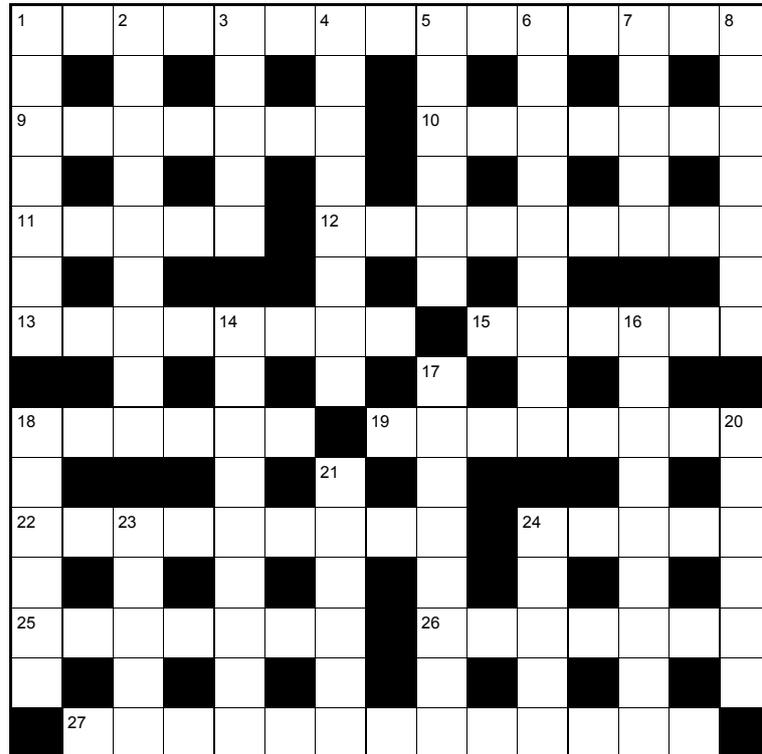
For now, have a go at the crossword on the opposite page, which was my valedictory puzzle in the *Cherwell*. It wasn’t designed to be easy, but it does contain a good selection of different types of clues. You’ll find the solution on page 32, together with brief explanations of the answer to each clue; if you don’t quite understand any of them, or have any other questions, drop me an email at [snufkin@moomins.demon.co.uk](mailto:snufkin@moomins.demon.co.uk) and I’ll be happy to explain.

You might have wondered about my title. ‘Ars Magna’ is, as the subtitle suggests, the Latin for ‘great art’. But did you notice that it’s also an anagram of ‘anagrams’? There’s a wonderful world of words out there. Good luck with exploring it.

***“The best way of getting better at crosswords is to do them regularly; for now, have a go at the one on the opposite page”***

# CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

Read the preceding article, then try *Snuufkin's* accompanying puzzle



## ACROSS

- 1/27. Trembling fan shook hands with star, and light fell on Dolphins' final performance (2,4,3,6,3,3,3,4)
9. In court, drunk is edgy (7)
10. Prisoner has to sign for post (7)
11. Recoils from pleasures (5)
12. Woody, nosy liar? (9)
13. Pardon me - anyhow, keep talking about Clinton or whoever... (4-4)
15. Leave taken by nightwatchman? (3,3)
18. Gallant losing love abruptly (6)
19. Bound to screw endlessly in lounge (8)
22. Might Sampras be such a cheat? (9)
24. Coppers might only amount to this (5)
25. Leftie comedian is taunted at first (7)
26. Tuning in thus, one should be able to pick everything up (3,4)
27. (see 1 across)

## DOWN

1. I'm the wanderer (7)
2. Veritable upheaval about new comet's recent arrival (4-5)
3. Wine gustation covers spicy port (5)
4. Soon taking advice on husband's response (8)
5. TV duo switching places in transfer (6)
6. Manual skill provided by member of crew on boat (9)
7. Snicker regularly, angering Henry (5)
8. Dispatch in the last post? (4-3)
14. Somehow Cato lived a luxurious life (5,4)
16. Soured relations with the Chinese? (9)
17. Scold Carr and hope for transformation (8)
18. Type of steel used in church at Rome (6)
20. The first one to believe (6)
21. Learnt about Letting Act (6)
23. Goods go on vehicle (5)
24. Starts to pitch into lamb and fried rice (5)

# SOLUTION TO SNUFKIN'S CROSSWORD

*Snufkin's puzzle is on the previous page*

1	S	O	2	L	O	3	N	G	4	A	N	5	D	T	6	H	A	7	N	K	8	S
	N		A		E		N					E		A		E					E	
9	U	P	T	I	G	H	T					10	C	O	N	S	I	G	N			
	F		E		U								A		D		G					D
11	K	I	C	K	S					12	P	I	N	O	C	C	H	I	O			
	I		O								H		T			R						F
13	N	A	M	E		14	D	R	O	P				15	D	A	Y	16	O	F	F	
			E		O									17	R		F		R			
18	C	U	R	T	L	Y				19	R	E	S	T	R	I	C			20	T	
	H									21	R		P					E				H
22	R	A	23	C	K	E	T	E	E	R				24	P	E	N	C	E			
	O		A		V		N						O		I		T					I
25	M	A	R	X	I	S	T							26	A	L	L	E	A	R	S	
	E		G		T		A								C		A		L			T
		27	F	O	R	A	L	L	T	H	E	F	I	S	H							

## ACROSS

- 1/27. Anagram of 'fan shook hands' & 'star' & 'light fell on'. (The final performance of the dolphins in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.)
9. UP (in court) + TIGHT (drunk) = edgy.
10. CON (prisoner) + SIGN (sign) = post.
11. Double definition.
12. Cryptic definition.
13. Anagram of 'pardon me'.
15. Whimsical double definition: the night-watchman might take the DAY OFF = leave.
18. COURTLY (gallant) - O (love) = abruptly.
19. TRIC (screw = trick; 'endlessly' means without the last letter) inside REST (lounge) = bound.
22. Whimsical double definition: Sampras plays with a racket, and so could be a RACKETEER = cheat.
24. Cryptic definition. (Coppers as in coins.)
25. MARX (comedian) + IS (is) + T (taunted at first = first letter of 'taunted') = leftie.
26. Cryptic definition.
27. (see 1ac)

## DOWN

1. Double definition, with a narcissistic twist. I am Snufkin; Snufkin is the wanderer from the *Moom-ins*.
2. LAER (veritable = real; 'upheaval' here means from bottom to top, i.e. backwards) outside TECOM (a 'new' version of COMET) = recent arrival.
3. Hidden word.
4. ANON (soon) outside TIP (advice) + H (husband) = liturgical response.
5. DEC ANT (TV duo = ANT DEC) = transfer.
6. HAND (member of crew) under CRAFT (boat) = manual skill.
7. NEIG (regularly angering = alternate letters of 'angering') + H (Henry) = snicker.
8. Double definition. (Think military funerals.)
14. Anagram of 'cato lived'.
16. Anagram of 'relations'.
17. Anagram of 'carr' & 'hope'.
18. CH (church) + ROME (rome) = type of steel.
20. THE (the) IST (first) = one to believe.
21. Anagram of 'learnt'.
23. GO (go) on CAR (vehicle) = goods.
24. PILAF (first letters of 'pitch into lamb and fried') = rice.