

## [Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 497: No Such Thing As Oceans Eleven with Puffins

Hi everyone, welcome to another episode of No Singers of Fish. This is another live show which was recorded at the Soho Theatre in London and who is our special guest today? Well if you are a podcast fan, if you are a fan of amazing books, if you were a fan of the TV show Horrible Histories then you'll know who I'm talking about. Our guest was the historian Greg Jenner. So like I say, Greg first came to prominence I suppose as the historical consultant on Horrible Histories but he has since become a nerdy superstar at his own right thanks to his podcast Your Dead To Me which you definitely, I'm sure you've heard it but if you haven't heard it you definitely should check that out but he also has written lots of books, the latest of which are called Ask A Historian and Dead Famous and Unexpected History of Celebrity and the very exciting thing about those if you are super quick off the blocks is that at the moment they are both 99p on ebook for the rest of September. He also has an illustrated kids book called You Are History and that is out in hardback and audiobook as well. Look, just go to the place where you buy your books, ebooks and audiobooks and search for Greg Jenner and you will not be disappointed and I hope you will also not be disappointed with this week's podcast so let's just get on with it. On with the podcast!

Hello and welcome to another episode of No Such Thing as a Fish, a weekly podcast this week coming to you live from the Soho Theatre in London!

My name is Jan Schreiber, I am sitting here with James Harkin, Andrew Hunter Murray and Greg Jenner and once again we have gathered round the microphones with our four favourite facts from the last seven days and in no particular order, here we go! Starting with fact number one and that is my fact this week. My fact is when Virginia's Barter Theatre first opened in 1933, it paid playwrights their royalties exclusively in ham.

Except for George Bernard Shaw, who was a vegetarian and managed to negotiate his payment to be in spinach.

Yeah, this is an amazing thing that happened during the Great Depression in America and this guy who was an actor, he was a very young actor at the time called Robert Porterfield, he found that all these actors were out of work, the theatres weren't running because no one could afford to go to the theatres but then he also noticed that there were a lot of farmers who had a lot of produce that they weren't able to shift, so he thought what if I set up a bartering theatre whereby you could trade ham for hamlet, that would be the system, right? So you could come in and you could then give any kind of produce that you wanted and that would get you a ticket and the bartering system worked very much like how bartering does, you know, you negotiate as you're doing it. More like bartering. Oh.

Very good, very good.

It was good, yeah.

Yeah, so it would be, it was good, Andy. Don't let everyone tell you differently.

Yeah, so the system, yeah, God, yeah.

Well, the stories are great because people have written about how this, you know, a lot of these playwrights, so when George Bernard Shaw was first asked, he said, I'm not really into it, and then Pygmalion came out and he said, oh, yes, Pygmalion.

Pygmalion.

Should have been Spinachmalion.

Should have been, yeah. So all the stories that he collected over the years, people got interviews out of him and it's really fun, so there would be examples of, say, a farmer who would bring his cow to the theatre and he'd say how much milk to get in to see the play and they would tell him and then he'd go to the side and milk the cow to the amount that they said, hand over the bucket and then he would start to go in and in the anecdote, his wife was with him and they said, you're not going to get your wife to come in as well, and he said, she can milk her own ticket.

I was wondering how they did change at the theatre because I thought you would say that. Oh, you hadn't done your hum and you got a little bit of bacon back.

Well, yeah, kind of. I mean, you could have a pig which was worth ten tickets.

Wow.

So I think if you traded a whole pig, maybe you got like a season pass, that kind of thing, but they accepted all sorts of, it wasn't just farm produce, they accepted toothpaste, snakes and underwear as well, which is good if you don't have a pig, so you can, you know, yeah.

With the toothpaste for the snakes. Do they have teeth? They have teeth, right? They've got fangs.

They've got fangs, yeah.

Can you brush a snake's teeth? Sorry, derail the podcast, haven't I?

You can milk a snake's teeth.

Hello.

One ticket.

There was all sorts of weird, like there was a boy who said that he had some jam or some kind of substance in a jar turned out to be mud, so people were trying to counterfeit their way in there as well.

There was someone who did bring a pig saying, I'll pay with my pig, but then the pig got loose and all the actors had to chase their money down the street.

And weirdly, there was a jail that was directly underneath the barter theatre.

So while they were doing the plays, there was always this slight concern that one of the jailmates would break free and sort of come onto stage and murder everyone.

So there was added conflict, you know.

Yeah, it sounds like it was an amazing place.

And one of the things was a guy came in, he was a mountaineer, and he said, I don't have any food, but I make coffins, do you all want a coffin?

And they said, no, we're fine.

He said, well, I make canes as well.

And he made so many canes that apparently every major actor in Broadway was seen walking round with one of these canes because he just kept making them and kept going to more and more shows.

That's cool.

Yeah.

I mean, to me, I know I am an ex-accountant, but it does sound like a massive tax dodge.

Oh, yeah.

Like, bartering is all well and good as long as you pay the tax on the actual amount of

the thing that you're bartering with.

Oh, yeah.

How much tax?

One slice of bacon?

Well, you know, 20% of your pig.

Oh, whatever.

That's the thing.

Like, there's that old story of Picasso, do you remember?

He was in a cafe.

I mean, I don't think this is true, but he was in...

Is it true?

Yeah, my mum's got one.

Wow.

So Picasso, if I know where you're going with it, Picasso used to buy his meals by doing a tiny little doodle because it would be worth more than the meal.

He did thousands.

They're now valueless.

Really?

Like, is that what Gary Linnaker has been doing in all restaurants?

In the restaurants.

All the restaurants in the UK have a signed photo of Gary Linnaker.

Yeah, yeah.

Like, everyone, and you can see it like, I was young, Gary was here, oh, Gary was here quite recently.

That's what he's doing.

I imagine that is what he's doing, right?

That probably is what he's doing.

It's probably getting free food.

Well, I don't want to do as much Gary Linnaker, but...

I'll have a go.

I don't mind.

We don't know.

The thing is, though, with Picasso, right, so the story goes, one of the story goes, that he did this doodle and they said, well, Mr. Picasso, will you sign it?

And he said, well, I want to pay for lunch.

I don't want to pay for the entire establishment.

Oh.

Right, that's the story.

So the thing is...

What a wanker.

That's what he said.

It's okay.

I don't think anyone's saying that Picasso wasn't a wanker.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Of all the artists, I think Picasso is very high in the wanker index.

Yeah.

Okay.

But the thing is, like, if you're an artist and you draw something and you're in a cafe and they give you some food, there are tax implications of that.

And really, it is against the law to do that.

The only way they could get around it is if Picasso, instead of just having lunch, if it was a business lunch, and if the people in the cafe were going to put the picture up on the wall so that everyone in the cafe can enjoy it, so technically it's decoration, then they're both business expenses, they're both tax deductible, that's fine.

Why do you think accountants have such a reputation for their illness?

Thank God James isn't at all these historical moments where Picasso lands an absolute zingo and he's going, well, actually, the tax implications of that are...

Could he do a smaller drawing to be the tax?

No.

Yeah, he could.

In fact, I believe in some places in America sometimes they have accepted artwork as tax payment from artists who couldn't afford to pay their tax and have done that.

So that is possible in theory, yeah.

I can't believe we're accepting this fact, given how much shit I took many episodes ago, when I said that if Mozart was on the street and he was passing someone who asked him for some money, a beggar, a homeless person was asking for some money, that he would say, I have no money, but here, let me write you some music, and he would be like, RAS, give it a go doody, and give it to them, and then they would take that and they would...

And do what?

Sell it.

What would you do with your Picasso?

You can sell it for a lot of money.

No, you can't.

No, you can't, because my mum has one, and you can't do anything with it.

Has your mum been trying to sell it?

Yeah, it's not worth anything.

I'll buy it.

All right.

I'll buy the on-site Picasso that we know is definitely him, yeah.

And also, how do you verify that the music is by Mozart when it's just one bar of music?

Because it sounds like Amber.

Right, yeah.

Barter.

Yeah.

Barter is a weird thing, isn't it?

Yeah.

Because there's a lot of debate about barter.

I think, I definitely thought it's the thing before money.

So the baker bakes some bread, and he goes to the butcher, and the butcher...

And the butcher has some meat, and between them they have a sandwich.

Well, they swap.

They have two sandwiches.

Exactly.

You end up with two sandwiches, and everyone's happy.

But of course, what if the butcher doesn't want any bread?

The baker starts to death.

Nightmare.

So you need money.

That's the basic, and I say very basic, premise.

But this is the weird thing about barter.

There's no...

I don't think there's any...

Actually, it seems like money produces barter systems.

Like, after the fall of the Roman Empire, people resorted to barter, because there wasn't a stable currency anymore.

There doesn't seem to be any good evidence of a proper barter society where someone says,

I'll give you these grapes if you give me that cloth.

It just doesn't seem to be any evidence for that.

Correct.

Oh, shit.

Not evidence that I found in a short look.

I mean, money's fascinating, right?

So coins are really new.

In terms of the history of the world, coins are...

They're like 2,700 years old, give or take.

They're really, really new.

So you've got these sort of enormous societies in the Bronze Age.

The Egyptians don't have money.

Oh, really?

The Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Akkadians don't have money.

Really?

And the first coin has got a little lion face, and it's very cute, and it's ancient Greek.

And I think at the city, I think it was maybe Liddy, I can't remember, but it's like 2,700 BCE.

So prior to that, you have economic structures, and you've got kings, and you've got people with power, and you have got distribution of wealth of a sort, but it's not cash.

And even in the 8th, 9th, 10th centuries, you get these coin hordes, you know, Viking coin hordes,

buried in the ground, and you're never entirely sure to what extent they are someone going, I'm going to put that in the ground and come back for it later, or it's someone's nicked it, or someone has been killed in battle, or, you know, we're never quite sure, because the money's not in circulation.

So the history of money is really interesting, because there's a lot of stuff we don't know.

But obviously, Barton must have been part of that equation.

Certainly in the Stone Age, no?

You're going to tell me there's no bartering in the Stone Age?

You're going to do that?

Go on, do it.

Yeah, sort it, why not?

Straight from nothing to Bitcoin.

That's what I'm saying.

But you are right that definitely when society breaks down, or when there's problems in society, we do resort to barter.

That's definitely true, right?

So in Russia, in the 90s, there's a lot of it going on.

So there was not much...

Certainly in the late 90s, not much demand for rubles.

If you've got any rubles, you just want to swap them for US dollars.

That's pretty much all you'd ever do with them.

And so when companies run out of cash to pay their workers, the workers would often just accept, you know, whatever you're making, you would take some of them home, and then you'd be able to swap that for dollars.

There's no point in having the rubles in between.

And so there was, like, Siberian workers who were paid in coffins, as we were saying before.

There was a Volgograd factory where all the workers were paid in bras.

And then there was another factory in Volgograd called Actuba, and they made navigation equipment.

But then they'd recently diversified into making dildos.

And the workers decided, well, we're not going to get paid otherwise, so we'll just accept the dildos as payment.

And this is in the Economist, guys.

What's happening?

And so they got all these dildos and then went to the local sex shops to try and sell them and get some US dollars.

But it turned out that just around the same time, the world had moved on to electronic vibrators,

and the dildos were virtually worthless.

Oh, nice.

So navigation to dildos.

Yeah, that's...

How do they diversify from that?

So it's what, from compass to compass, is that...?

Wow.

Yeah, I'd...

Sexton. You had sexton.

Sorry. Sorry.

Wow, is there a heartwarming end to the story

where they all use the dildos to build a new...

There's no heartwarming ending to any story  
that begins in Russia in 1999.

Do you remember the story of that guy

who bought up a huge bulk amount of copies of Lance Armstrong's book?

It's all about the bike, and then...

It's not about the bike.

Did he do two books? No.

It's not about the bike.

Which turned out to be...

Um, and...

Yeah, this guy suddenly had a warehouse full of these books,  
and no one was buying them,

because this guy was an untouched celebrity all of a sudden.

Did he buy them before...? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

It was, like, just before. He was like,

did the deal and suddenly, like, news headline, Lance Armstrong.

That's bad.

So was he sort of bulk ordering them

in the hope of then selling them a nice...

I think, like, they were remaindered,

and he thought, I'll buy them and I can do a trade of them somehow.

Here's a place that does have butter. This is good.

Zoos operate a barter system

with each other, even today,

because you need a permit

to buy and sell endangered animals,

but in America, zoos are allowed

to barter their creatures.

Yeah.

So in 2014, there was an aquarium in Boston

that needed some fish,

and North Carolina's aquarium had some of those fish.

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And North Carolina wanted jellyfish and snipefish  
in exchange for the fish that they were going to give to Boston.  
But the Boston people didn't have snipefish.

So Boston had to...

Is this a riddle?

Hang on, Greg, hang on.

So they had to get some Japanese snipefish,  
swap them for some bloodfish that they did have in Boston,  
then they sent North Carolina those.

But they can't be on the craft  
at the same time as the fox.

Yeah. And the fox is in a submarine.

Yeah.

The zookeeper was the mother.

That's it.

That's really cool, and it's because in the olden days,  
if you had a zoo, you'd just send someone off  
and say, I'd like two pandas, please.

And they'd just go and get you two pandas,  
but you can't really do that anymore. No.

And there was one...

Because of Brexit.

There was one aquarium  
that swapped 800 mackerel  
for a dozen puffins.

Does that feel like a good deal for you?

I'd love a dozen puffins.

Yeah? I feel like a dozen puffins  
is exactly the right number of puffins.

I feel like that's a bank job.

It's like Ocean's Eleven,  
but puffins.

I think if your mother put up that Picasso,  
you could trade that for 11 puffins.

The Picasso is a dove,  
dove of peace.

We could swap a dove of peace for 12 puffins,  
and then I could hit a bank  
and take on a casino.

Sorry, are you the 13th puffin  
in the costume?

I'm George Clooney puffin.

Yeah, nice.

And then we'll have Brad Pitt puffin, Matt Damon puffin,



and other puffins. I've forgotten who else is in the film.

Gently. Is he in the film?

I don't know.

Sorry, how did your mum come by this picture at the Picasso?

Did she buy it or...? No, she was gifted,

I think, because it's not value

and it's just got...it's not enough value

to be worth anything, so it's a gift

you give someone in return for, like,

oh, thanks, that was really nice. Here's a...

Here's a Picasso. James, are there any tax implications

to Greg's mum receiving this

priceless work of...

If she got them as part of her job, yes, there would be.

All right, she's a French teacher.

Where do we stand on that?

Oh!

Stop the podcast!

Stop the podcast!

Hi, everybody. Just wanted to let you know

we are sponsored this week by Netsuite.

Netsuite are a company

that provide business and accounting software

and there are three

numbers you need to know.

36,025

one. So,

36,000 is the number of businesses

upgraded to Netsuite by Oracle.

And that is a cloud

financial system. It offers accounting,

financial management, inventory, HR,

you name it. 25

is the age of Netsuite.

Oh, to be 25 again, Andrew.

But they have been going for

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OK, on with the podcast.

On with the show.

OK, it is time for fact number two  
and that is Greg.

My fact is complex, so I'm  
apologizing in advance for it. But my fact  
is this, at different times in history,  
Mondays have been considered the first  
day of the week, the second, the third  
and the seventh.

Wow. And what is it now?

Right. So,

we've got six hours, yeah?

Yeah.

Now, it's officially, internationally  
is the first day of the week.

OK. The International Standards Committee  
or whatever they're called. Because I was always  
taught at school that it's Sunday  
is the first day of the week. Yeah, so in the  
religious Christian calendar Mondays the second  
day of the week now, it used to be the third  
day of the week because in the Jewish calendar  
it was the third day, Sabbath and the Saturday  
Sunday and then Monday became the third.

But then when you get Christianity  
becoming dominant in Rome in the sort of  
second and third centuries, they move  
Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. And so  
Monday becomes the second day.

But the really tricky thing about it is that  
the Industrial Revolution gives us  
Mondays as we know them. The Garfield

one, the Monday. The Garfield Monday that he hates. Yeah.

There's a lot of great philosophers who do Mondays. Plutarch, Dio Cassius, Bob Geldof, Garfield.

And so our Mondays is an economic Monday. Our Monday is the post-Industrial Revolution where you get the invention of a brand new temporal structure called the weekend, right? The weekend is a new thing, it's about 100 years old. And so Mondays get redefined. But in ancient astronomy, Mondays are wrong.

So the days of the week should be, according to astronomy, it should be Saturday, Thursday, Tuesday, Sunday, Friday, Wednesday, Monday. Poor Craig David. He'd be so good to you.

Took her to a park on Monday. Met her for the first time Tuesday. What's happening?

So that's the order that astronomically the planet should be in. And we've got this really lovely ancient book we don't have, we've got the title of, by Plutarch.

And the title is literally, why is the days of the week ordered wrongly? It's the kind of thing you Google at 3 a.m. and you're like, well, Tuesday.

So Dio Cassius wrote that thing saying what's happened here is it's because there's 168 hours in a week. There are 24 hours in a day which the Romans are very keen on. Each hour gets assigned to a god. The first hour goes to the god and that god gets that day named after them. The second hour, next god, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, and then you're back to the first god again.

By the time you get to the 25th hour, you're on to the second god. So the day gets named after him. And so you end up with the days being in the wrong order. So our Mondays are in the wrong and the Romans are like, oh no, we'll just have to live with it. And we have, we've lived with it ever since. That's amazing. That is incredible. I've got a fact about Tuesday. Is it Thursday, Tuesday or Saturday, Tuesday? I'm going to go for my Tuesday, which is tomorrow, yeah. So we're doing this on a Monday, we should say, for the audience listening at home. So this is cool. This happened last year. The 22nd of February, 2022 was a Tuesday. It was Tuesday. It was very nice. 22, 22, 22, Tuesday. It was Tuesday. That's nice. That's the end of the fact. Mondays cause lightning. The fact. That's a good thing. Well, it's not a good thing, actually. It's just a thing. So it's because of car exhaust. So more people commute on Mondays. So scientists counted lightning strikes in the USA for a decade and worked out where they fall, where the distribution is. So this is particularly in southeastern states in the USA. And lightning strikes rock it because there's a bit more pollution in the air. The air is moisture. There are low-lying clouds. That creates the perfect conditions for lightning. So yeah, for hundreds of miles, you get more lightning on a Monday. That's really interesting. I've got a Wednesday fact. No.

Go on. Is this your Wednesday?

It's my Wednesday.

It's a day after tomorrow. We're recording this on a Monday.

People are having...

According to one study,

the best time to tweet

or X is to...

Oh, no.

Oh, my God.

Look at you staying in with Elon.

You creep.

Apparently, if you want to get maximum impact,

it's 5 p.m. on a Wednesday

is when you should send that tweet.

Really? Yeah, they've just scanned through

where most have engagement and so on,

and apparently that's the one.

I mean, that doesn't feel...

What's happening at 5 p.m. on a Wednesday?

They just found engagement was higher.

That's wrong. I don't like that stat.

I reckon it's because people aren't really

trying as hard because it's not Monday anymore.

Right. But you also haven't left early

because it's not Friday. It's just like the perfect time.

So you're stuck in the office.

You're looking your phone. It's 5 p.m. and you're out that door.

I reckon. Do you got any Thursday facts, then?

I do.

There's a theory that the universe was created

last Thursday.

It's called last Thursdayism.

And the idea is that...

And it's very hard to just prove this.

Was this fact three weeks old, in which case the universe

hasn't been created yet?

Was it always last Thursday?

It's always last Thursday.

The idea is that every memory that you have,

everything that's on our planet,

everything has been set to seem like it's been here

for millions and billions of years

in the case of the Age of the Universe.

So last Thursdayism says it's impossible

to deny the theory  
that it's infallible as a fact  
because it's impossible  
to find a glitch in. Right.  
Well, what if I put something in a box last Thursday  
and then I open the box today? Your theory falls over.  
No, it doesn't, because your memory is you put it last Thursday.  
Yeah, but I know I did.  
But I wrote a label.  
I labelled it Thursday.  
No, I labelled it Wednesday. I labelled it Wednesday.  
I can't believe, Andy, that you found  
the hole in the bearing.  
Wow. How come Andy's underpants  
that say Thursday on them  
are still in the wash?  
Yeah.  
I've got a fact about Fridays.  
Oh, yeah. You want to hear that? Do you know Dress Down Friday?  
Dress Down Friday, yeah.  
Do you know who invented that  
or why it was invented?  
Military thing. It's a military thing.  
Yeah? Yeah. Like, every Friday  
you don't have to wear your uniform.  
Yeah, you're starting the city, but you're wearing a Hawaiian shirt.  
Yeah, exactly.  
It's fun. It's good for morale.  
It's bad for camouflage, but  
it'll be fun.  
Well, I gave you a clue there.  
It was invented by people who made Hawaiian shirts  
to sell more Hawaiian shirts.  
Really?  
Really? This was in the 60s.  
Yeah, it was a company  
it was the Hawaiian fashion guild, actually.  
And they came up with the idea of  
Aloha Fridays,  
where everyone would wear a Hawaiian shirt  
into work and then it just took off  
and now we have people just wearing jeans  
but do the people who work at the  
Hawaiian fashion guild have to go in

in a three-piece suit on a Friday?  
Just while we were talking about military  
on Fridays as well, there's a thing  
on Japanese Navy ships and submarines  
that they have curry  
every night on Friday nights  
because on a ship it might, you might lose  
the track of the days and that's a way of them going  
oh, it's Friday, we're having curry.  
It's a thing on the menu that allows for them to remember.  
Yeah, because you do lose track.  
And on a Saturday you feel like, you know?  
Yeah.  
No, that's, no.  
I do have a Saturday fact if that's what  
you're edging towards.  
But it's absolutely not that.  
Okay, go on, let's hear your Saturday fact.  
My Saturday fact is that on US ships  
and submarines they will have burgers  
for dinner just so they remember what  
day it is so that they know  
and that's because you can lose track  
when you're on a ship or a submarine.  
They will have burgers and they're like, ah, Saturday.  
Yeah, I feel like I'm losing track now.  
Yeah.  
Mondays, this is a study from 2006  
but Mondays, most of us apparently  
are tired and depressed on a Monday  
and work that requires emotional involvement  
or flair should be avoided.  
Or flair?  
I'm afraid so. Oh, wow.  
It's best to be alone.  
Our lines of communication mentally are largely closed  
and communication with each other  
is also poorer on a Monday.  
So that's why we did this kick on a Monday, was it?  
Yeah.  
So we're proving it, are we?  
Very quickly, because I just thought  
Friday's are obviously Freyja.  
So these are the Germanic gods, right?

So Saturday is Saturn.  
It's the only one of the days of the week  
that's named after a Roman god.  
All the others are Monday, Sunday, and then Germanic gods.  
Who's Freyja?  
Anglo-Saxon and Norse goddess.  
Very powerful, very cool.  
Thursday's Thor, or Thunor,  
Wednesday's Woden,  
but the Romans called Venus the planet,  
not Venus.  
They called it Lucifer.  
And the Greeks called it  
Phosphorus, like Giver.  
So it suddenly reminded me that Friday is named after Venus.  
Aphrodite.  
But they didn't call the planet Venus.  
They called it Lucifer.  
So they would see Lucifer in the sky and go,  
There he is!  
Quite a scary name.  
Although they didn't call it Lucifer, they'd call it Lucifer.  
Latin. Lucifer.  
That's awesome. Go on, Dan, tell us your Sunday fact.  
So, on Sundays,  
in order for US Navy ships  
and submarines  
to know what day it is, they have steak  
because you can lose track of time  
when you're on ship. So they will have steak on a Sunday  
and they're like, ah, it's a Sunday.  
We're recording this on a Monday, by the way.  
That's fine.  
We're going to have to move on to our next fact  
in one sec. Should we go for it?  
I can give you a quick Sunday fact.  
Obviously Sunday trading was a thing.  
There are certain things you're allowed to sell on Sundays,  
certain things you weren't.  
And so if you're a shopkeeper, you're allowed to sell food  
for horses because they were working animal,  
but you weren't allowed to sell food for dogs  
because it was a pet often.  
This is in Hansard in 1968.



They were discussing this.  
And apparently the reason that they wanted to change the rules  
is because it was such nonsense  
that a man could go into a shop  
and say, I have a pony  
who only eats dog biscuits.  
Can I have some dog biscuits  
for my pony?  
And they had to give him the biscuits.  
And that's when they thought maybe we need to change  
our rules a little bit. That's so good.  
That's amazing.  
OK, it is time for fact number three  
and that is Andy.  
My fact is that the first electric cars  
were taken away each night and delivered  
back to your door fully charged  
in the morning. So they were like  
choose outside hotel rooms, basically.  
They were taken out. So it takes them away.  
Polishes them. Is that what happens?  
I tell you what, we stay at travel lodges.  
Where are you staying?  
What are you talking about?  
That's a thing.  
I feel like I'm immediately distracted from the main point of the...  
But that does happen in hotels.  
You put your shoes outside the room and then they...  
Like, if you want them polished, you don't have to...  
What?  
Do you leave a note on them?  
It's bread, it's understood.  
You don't need to leave a note.  
I tell you what, I tell you what,  
hotels where I stay and they would just get stolen.  
Just by round of chews.  
Has anyone heard of that in here?  
OK, a few people.  
Not as many heard of it.  
Not enough for...  
OK, can I retake my fact?  
The fact is fine, it was the following.  
First electric cars were taken away each night  
and delivered to your door fully charged for the morning.

A unique occurrence.  
When are we talking?  
First electric cars.  
So early, early days.  
Late 19th, early 20th century.  
This is from an interview with the head of Ford.  
I was listening to a podcast the other day  
which was interviewing him, he's called Jim Farley.  
And he was talking about the firm Detroit Electric  
who they made early cars.  
Like, loads of the early cars  
when combustion engines were just starting  
were electric.  
And the electric ones, they were kind of marketed at...  
They were marketed at women, basically.  
Yeah.  
They are a bit daintier.  
You don't have to hand crank them to start  
because that's quite...  
It's quite a physical...  
The smell was particularly a big part.  
Petrol stains and it's all...  
Yeah, and also Wikipedia claims  
they were sold to women drivers and physicians.  
No idea why.  
I think the idea was if you needed to go  
and save someone's life really quickly  
because they were sick, you wouldn't have to do all the cranking.  
You just go straight away.  
That's good. OK, OK, that tracks then.  
Yeah. And they had this system with the doors  
where they didn't have the charging capacity  
in your home, obviously, because most houses  
weren't even on the electric at that point.  
And they sound like mad cars.  
They were operated, this is incredible, from the back seat.  
It's so amazing.  
For the back seat, they had a rear-facing front seat  
so you could face your passengers.  
Oh, great.  
You could put your passengers in the front seat  
facing backwards to you. You can chat to them as you drive.  
But you can't see the road.  
And they also...

Instead of a steering wheel, boring, they had a tiller.

Yeah.

Because it was nice and calm.

It was like having a lovely sailboat or something.

What's a tiller? Like a rudder, basically.

On the back of the boat.

So it's left to go right to go left.

I know. So you have to do it backwards

from the back seat of the car, unable to see the road ahead of you.

The tiller thing is amazing.

So Ben's invented the steering wheel

in the 1890s.

Ben's and Jerry's, yeah.

Ben's and Jerry's.

But Americans just stuck with this tiller the whole time.

And there was a journalist

writing around the time who said,

few have adopted that foreign freak,

the steering wheel.

A car with a wheel would be a nerve-racker

of the worst kind.

Imagine that, a steering wheel.

It's amazing.

So it came back to your house fully charged.

Yep.

And we're talking not lithium-ion batteries,

we're talking what, lead-acid?

Exactly what the batteries were.

How do you charge it?

For sure, they were acid batteries, I'm pretty sure.

But I think what would happen most of the time

is they would replace the battery.

And then the battery would go back somewhere else

to be charged, which might take time, I don't know.

It was a lot of these places

which I think would be really cool now

as someone with an electric car.

I'd love to just, instead of plug in,

they just take the battery out and put another one back in

and you go straight away.

That's a cool idea.

People were used to changing horses.

And this was kind of the obvious way of doing it.

What was what? Like, you get up in the morning,

you look outside your door, you get your nice polished shoes,  
go down, you take a fresh horse.

Someone has recharged your shoes.

Rechargeable batteries were invented in 1859.

Wow.

So it's quite early, right? So that's Gaston Plante  
who invents them, and that's quite exciting.

But that's already 20-odd years after the first electric car.

It's really amazing how early they are.

Because we now look at electric cars  
and we kind of go like, oh, you know, Elon Musk.

But, like, the electric car is, like,

so much more established

than fuel, than petrol.

But for 20 years

they couldn't recharge the batteries.

That's the thing. Got a battery, finished it, like, bang.

Throw the car away.

I mean, you just chuck it and you get a new one.

The guy I like is, have you heard of Sebran de Stratting?

No.

He's Dutch guy.

He sort of deserves more or renown.

He's quite cool.

He possibly invented the first electric car

that's, like, decent and we know about.

There's a Scotsman who called Robert Anderson

who maybe invented one in the 1830s

but we don't know much about it.

But Sebran de Stratting lived in Groningen.

He was a Dutch chemistry professor.

And in 1835 he makes an electric car.

It weighs about three kilos.

It's a tricycle.

He can carry about 1.5 kilos, which is a guinea pig.

I don't know. It's not great, is it?

It can go for 20 minutes.

And it's 1835, nearly 200 years ago.

Sebran de Stratting is already electrified.

But he's very cool because he also

he spoke 13 languages.

He built early electric light bulbs

50 years before Edison.

He fought a pandemic.

There was a malaria outbreak in Groningen  
and he built a small chlorine factory  
to create disinfectant for the people.

Wow.

And he built an electric boat.

So this one sort of chemistry professor  
in the mid-1830s was just sort of going,  
yeah, I'll do a bit of this, a bit of that, a bit of this.

Why don't we know his name?

I think he's sort of been slightly forgotten  
and I discovered a PhD thesis by a Dutch historian  
who's been trying to, like,  
just get back to the basics because it's really fascinating.

And I've got a picture of the car here.

Perfect for a podcast.

Sorry.

God, that is an unbelievable picture.

What?

Wow.

And the genitals are so impressive.

And the polishing finish on those shoes.

Wow.

But yeah, I like him.

He's doing electric cars in the 1830s  
way before Edison, way before Ford.

What's his name again?

I've forgotten it.

Zebrandes Strating.

Dutch listeners will yell at me for getting that horribly wrong.

But yeah, 1830s.

And it's very cool.

In 1908 there was a race Philadelphia  
between Mrs Laura Duval  
who owned an electric car  
with a top speed of 17 miles an hour  
and a guy who owned  
a petrol car that could go 60 miles an hour  
whose name appears to have been  
Driver Middleton.

So his first name was Driver.

I don't understand that really.

But it was in the papers, this is true.

And they decided to have a race through the city  
to see who would be the fastest see if electric cars

were better than petrol cars.  
And the slight twist in kind of a top gear style is they had to stop at a few shops and do a few things on the way through the city.  
And the woman who had the electric car she won by 10 minutes and the reason being that she didn't have to crank it.  
And the thing is like you couldn't really go much faster than 20 miles an hour in the cities in the time because there was so much other traffic and the roads and people in the roads and stuff.  
And so really that was the fastest you could go even if you had a 60 mile an hour car.  
And so the lack of cranking meant it was a much better.  
Lack of cranking. That feels like that's a life lesson there.  
So that's the reason that electric cars didn't win the race against petrol cars is because people stopped having to crank their cars into life.  
So they invented the thing called the electric starter which meant you no longer had to crank the car.  
Electricity meant that the electric car failed.  
Dramatic irony.  
I mean dramatic irony up the wazoo.  
That's insane.  
And there was another thing, the muffler.  
The muffler was invented which made petrol cars quieter.  
Yeah, that was a big issue.  
And they got cheaper and cheaper.  
It's also the discovery of oil, right?  
Yeah, the discovery of oil was a minor third element which revolutionised the...  
I mean Edison is talking to Ford, I think.  
They're having conversations about whether to go big and produce electric cars on mass because at this point London got electric tube trains in 1890.  
It got electric trams in 1901 and it got electric buses

called electro buses in 1907  
and they were powered by batteries.  
So if you go on YouTube there's footage of  
like Leicester Square or Piccadilly Circus  
in 1908 or something.  
There are electric buses  
pootling around. Crazy.  
We were saying we did a show about suffragettes recently  
but you do see these images where suffragettes  
are on electric scooters.  
And I mean it's basically London today.  
Popping a wheelie. Yeah, exactly.  
How they were getting to throw bricks  
at parliament and stuff via electric scooter  
which is mad.  
And one of the big things I guess is that  
there was so much resistance not only from  
members of the public who might not have thought  
that this was a useful thing  
but by the rail workers as well  
because trains were, you know, everyone would be out of a job  
if suddenly these electric cars worked.  
So early cars were being hit  
by a whole group and whole industry  
because they just thought, no way, we don't want to.  
My favourite electric car from this era  
is called the electro bat.  
Oh yeah. 1894.  
I feel like Batman  
in an electric car  
but like a really cute pootling 15 mile an hour one.  
That's a Chris Nolan movie I want to see.  
In order to defeat fear  
you must become fear but only at 15 miles an hour.  
In America  
this is in the 50s now  
they used to do  
mass car blessings.  
If you got a car you used to go to the church  
and have your car blessed just for, you know,  
good karma basically.  
I'm mixing my religions there but yeah.  
Oh nice.  
Oh shit!

Oh wow!  
You self-punned yourself.  
Wow, that was cool.  
Care to come back into the room Mr Shriver?  
I'm just doing my victory lap, Andy.  
So yeah, so you would take it to church  
and you would have it blessed by a priest.  
Is it like a drive through?  
No but they did have on mass.  
On mass?  
Oh fuck!  
I am on fire!  
I feel like if I put my shoes on you they're going to recharge.  
What puns coming next?  
No one knows.  
I'm too nervous.  
I'm going to start trying to think a word and I should just say it.  
Stay in that state.  
I'll stay in the zone, yeah.  
So yeah, so they would do mass blessings and so on  
and it would be thousands. Yeah, pretty cool, hey.  
We do need to move on in a second.  
In 2010 Renault in France were sued  
for trying to call their new electric car the Zoe.  
Can you guess why?  
The Zoe.  
So was it by another person called Zoe  
who didn't want to be  
Zoe Wanamaker?  
It was by two married couples  
who both had daughters  
named Zoe Renault.  
Their surname was Renault, it's just a name.  
And so they said  
our children's, our daughters' lives  
will be irreversibly damaged  
if you call your new car the Renault Zoe.  
And they basically  
they brought a case saying first names are for humans.  
Not for cars.  
So French.  
But listen to this.  
This is from the reporting of the time, right?  
The lawyer also argued



that all of France's thousands of Zoe's  
could be affected with playground teasing  
and, as they grow older,  
comments in bars such as  
Can I see your airbags?  
Or  
Can I shine your bumper?  
The case was rejected flat out of hand.  
Stop the podcast.  
Stop the podcast.  
Hi everyone, we'd like to let you know  
we are sponsored by LinkedIn Talent Solutions.  
Yes.  
Now LinkedIn, LinkedIn jobs as they're also known  
help people find people  
to hire for their business.  
And it's a high stakes decision.  
You want to be certain that the people you're taking on  
are good, that they're nice, that they're fun,  
that they're good at the work.  
Good at the work, almost one of the most important things I would say.  
But how do people know  
that you're hiring?  
If you have a baker's shop  
on the high street, you can't paint it purple  
when anyone walking past knows that you're hiring that day.  
But on LinkedIn  
you can add a purple  
hashtag hiring frame  
to your profile and whenever  
anyone just wonders past your account  
they will see that you're hiring.  
That's right. And you have simple tools.  
You have screening questions.  
Can you bake bread? Do you know what sourdough is?  
Have you ever seen a bun?  
That makes it easy to focus on candidates  
with the skills and experience.  
You can prioritize who you want to interview  
so if you're looking for someone  
who has seen a lot of buns  
or indeed has done anything appropriate  
to your company, then you can post a job  
for free at LinkedIn.com

slash fish and terms and conditions  
apply. Exactly.  
Go to LinkedIn.com  
slash fish and post that job of yours  
for free. Okay, on with the podcast.  
On with the show.  
I did need to move us on to our final fact.  
It is time for our final fact of the show  
and that is James.  
Okay, my fact this week is that in 1908  
the New York Times  
reported on a dog in France  
that was deliberately knocking  
children into the sea before  
rescuing them and claiming a reward.  
So yeah, this is a thing that  
happened. It was  
in the New York Times that the  
headline was dog a fake hero.  
And they said  
that he was doing it to win beef steaks.  
And yeah, basically a child  
had fallen into the river  
and he'd gone and saved the child  
and they'd given him a big old steak  
and he thought, well, I could do with a bit more  
of that.  
And sure enough, over the next few days  
more and more children started falling  
in the sea and the same dog  
kept saving them. That's amazing.  
Isn't it cool? That's incredible, isn't it?  
How long did the scam go before people went  
hang on us? It was only a few times.  
The newspaper article said it wasn't  
too long before the jig was up.  
But actually  
this isn't the first dog who's done this.  
I found an article  
in the spectator from 1885  
about a dog in Lake Ontario  
who had pulled a boy out of  
Lake Ontario and they'd taken him  
and they said he went to a confectioner's

and given him a variety of cakes and other sweets.

I'm not sure if dogs are allowed  
to eat cakes and other sweets, but they did anyway.

But sure enough, he started  
pushing kids into the  
lake.

It's such a good example of unintended consequences.

It's brilliant, isn't it?

I was looking into life-saving dogs  
and I found a report.

This is from 2009, right? That Italy had  
300 life-saving

dogs that were stationed at beaches.

OK, I'm just going to tell you what it said, right?

And then we can get into it because  
the vice president of the training school  
was a woman called Donna Pascuali and she said  
that, I'm quoting here,

the dogs learned to tow their instructors out  
to sea so they had

the medical strength to give attention to drowning  
swimmers. Oh, yeah, that makes sense.

Does it? Well, if you don't have a boat,  
if you don't have a boat... OK, that's the if.

That's the big if. Yeah.

Because why can't you just have a boat?

But, OK...

They've spent on the money on dogs.

Exactly.

OK, OK, Dan, that's...

OK, so maybe you don't have a boat on any of the 300  
beaches where you stationed the dogs.

Here's what

Ms Pascuali said.

The dogs are incredibly strong. Our record  
is one dog towing 40 people at the same time.

Are they Newfoundland dogs?

Are they Newfoundland dogs?

Who fucking cares, Dan? It's 40 people!

Yeah.

One dog can't tow 40 people. That's impossible.

Are they not on a lilo?

Are they floating on the surface  
at your still? Exactly.

So why are the dogs towing 40 doctors  
on the same...  
At that point, I feel, get a boat.  
Sometimes, Andy,  
and I only know this because I do watch a lot of Baywatch,  
you can't  
make it out past the surf  
on a boat, right?  
So when you're swimming, if you're on a speed boat  
and the waves are coming in thick and high,  
you're going to get flipped over.  
You're not going to make it out. So that's why David Hasselhoff  
always runs with that little red thing  
that looks like a mini, like, micro surfboard  
and does that. Now,  
let me ask you this.  
How much better would Baywatch be  
if he had a dog under his arm  
and was able to conserve his energy?  
There you go. Not surf it,  
but, like, get out there in that sort of way, right?  
It makes total sense.  
Well, you've put me back in my box, Dan.  
I thought that was an insane thing about a dog towing 40 people,  
but you've made me see it as a very reasonable...  
The reason I mentioned  
Newfoundland dogs is because a lot of  
rescue boats take  
Newfoundland dogs with them on it  
in order to... They're amazing  
at saving people. They're these big,  
fluffy life rafts, basically.  
They get into the water, you can lay on them  
like your Kate Winslet on the door  
and you can be saved, right?  
And there's a story, and Greg, I wanted to ask you about this.  
Actually, full disclosure,  
it's the only time I've ever asked a guest  
whether or not this is true, and you said,  
no, but I'm going to ask you anyway.  
Apparently, Napoleon  
fell off a boat and a Newfoundland dog  
jumped in after him and saved him.  
No.

So your answer is still the same as before the show,  
is what you're saying.  
I mean, there's a billion stories about Napoleon  
and you can never, ever rely on any of them,  
so maybe, maybe, maybe.  
I'm still... Upgraded to a maybe.  
I'm still taken by your vision of Titanic's  
closing scenes, Dan.  
Get off the dog!  
I've got some other hero dogs  
who might be villains, but not really,  
but they're not villains,  
so they might have stolen a bit of thunder from other dogs.  
So the most famous one is Balto.  
Have you ever heard of Balto?  
Balto, no. Balto.  
He was a hero dog, really famous,  
because he was part of a team of sled dogs,  
sort of, you know, 120-odd dogs  
and 20 mushes,  
150 dogs, I think,  
who saved a town in Alaska in 1925 called Nome,  
and they had a terrifying  
outbreak of a really horrible disease.  
I think it was diphtheria.  
They couldn't get the medicine to them because it was just frozen,  
they couldn't get there, the ships wouldn't get there,  
and a team of, kind of,  
sled dog mushes, I guess,  
volunteered, and they had to take this medicine  
670 miles in terrifying,  
you know, the worst possible  
the Alaskan weather you can think of.  
And it's called the Great Mercy Race for Nome,  
and Balto was the lead dog  
in the final leg  
and became, like, a Hollywood celebrity.  
They put a statue up in Central Park,  
became really famous, he was stuffed,  
put in a museum, and everyone was like,  
Balto was a crap dog.  
Really? Balto, the hero dog?  
He was never a good dog, there were other dogs,  
really that dog, that dog.

And it sort of turns out, maybe, that the musher at the end, a guy called Gunnar Carson, he had been doing the second to last leg and he got to the, kind of, way station and found the other guy who was meant to finish the run was asleep, and he says, oh, well, I didn't want to wake him up and delay, I thought we just had to get to Nome and so I did the final leg on my own as well, so we did two legs with Balto as a lead dog. But there's a sort of controversy as to whether he stole this guy's thunder, stole the other dog's thunder, and the Balto, the, kind of, mediocre dog and Carson, you know, but basically nabbed the headlines and ended up as the hero of this enormous, sort of, relay race to save a town. But there's a bit of kind of a controversy as to whether he maybe nicked that from someone else. And I guess they kind of don't care that much because it gets a story out there still, right? And it's, like, the face of the story, so that's kind of the important part. I've got another villain that I found out as well, worth mentioning. Have you heard of the DC superhero called Dog Welder? No? No, it's not Dog Welder. So Dog Welder, he was a villain, and what he used to do was weld people's dogs to their faces. That was his thing. And he has, you can read a, you can read a sort of bio on him, so powers and abilities, abilities, dog welding. Obsession has a strong compulsion to weld dogs on people's faces. Equipment. Welding equipment. Weapons. Dogs. Which he welds onto people's faces. And so this was a DC comic. Yeah, yeah.

Wasn't he part of a, I think I remember,  
there was, he was in a team, and one of the other  
team was the defenestrator  
who carried around a window to throw  
people through.

I think you're thinking, because  
he gets rid of now, I think you're thinking  
of Dog Welder 2.

Who was, basically there was a husband  
who one day goes to an antique shop.  
He's possessed by original Dog Welder's  
welding equipment, which happens to be in the shop.  
And then he immediately  
gets very obsessed with welding dogs  
and welds the family dog to his children's  
faces.

His wife is furious. She divorces him.  
And so he's like struggling with it,  
because he wants to get back with these kids.  
He's like, why am I welding dogs to people's faces?  
And then it turns out, and this is, he turns  
into a good guy, because he learns  
that actually, there's  
a moment where the stars, Sirius A  
and B, are expanding, and if they  
touch, they'll explode and destroy  
Earth. And so...

The dog stars.  
And he realizes he's meant to weld them together.

So he punches  
some massive astronauts in the face,  
steals their outfits, their  
astronaut suits, outfits.

And flies  
beyond the moon to the Sirius  
stars, where he welds the planets,  
the stars back together, and he dies  
in the process. But so he turns  
good in the end, Dog Welder.

It's a brilliant thing.

When you weld a dog to a face,  
do you go dog face to human face?  
Do you do dog bum to human face?  
Do you do dog side? Like a human

centipede kind of thing. Human centipede?  
Is it schnauz as a schnauz?  
I would have thought the side of the dog  
to the side of the face, that's why I was thinking.  
I would think so. But don't you have to have metal  
to weld things together? Yeah.  
Yeah.  
Oh, hang on. Sorry.  
Just one dog can tow 40 people.  
No, you're right, Andy.  
Let me write to Fantasyland,  
care of James and Andy.  
If we  
welded a Newfoundland to David Hasselhoff.  
We must wrap up soon, but...  
Can I tell you one last thing? Yeah.  
In 2015, the Telegraph reported on a stray dog  
called Archie, who had been rescued.  
It was a really nice story and coached  
back to strength by a volunteer.  
Jack Russell, little dog.  
And it was a lovely French nursery  
school teacher who had been volunteering  
at the centre and spending all of her weekends with him.  
She sang him lots of songs in French  
and she called him Mon Petit Choux and all of this.  
And as a result, Archie now only reacts  
to commands given in a French accent.  
And if you want Archie to do anything,  
you have to say,  
what is a seat?  
Anyone?  
Do anything else?  
Wackies!  
I got a very, very quick story.  
No, go for it. We have a few more minutes.  
Okay, so about clever dogs.  
So, the Spectator,  
which is where I told you about the second  
evil dog.  
They actually got a bit of a reputation  
in the 19th century for sort  
of clever dog stories.  
That's to such an extent that whenever



they write about them, they say,  
oh, this is yet another Spectator dog.  
But they would always get people writing in  
with these stories and they all said  
they were definitely true.  
So, there was one person who said that they  
were in church and there was a new priest.  
And the priest was saying a sermon  
and it was going on forever and ever and ever.  
And there was a dog in there and he got restless  
and the dog knew that an altar boy  
would always go around with the plates  
to collect money just before the end  
of the church service.  
And while this pastor was sort of droning on,  
he went over to the boy  
who always took it and sort of looked  
at him, just stared at him  
and said, when are you going to do your bloody thing?  
And then when the boy  
didn't do anything, he started  
to beg for him to do the passing  
the plate round. And when he didn't do anything about  
that, he started nuzzling him and trying  
to push him around the church to try and  
get him to do this part of the mass.  
And then knocked out the boy,  
took his cassock,  
dressed up as the boy,  
conducted the search.  
So not the search.  
What's the free money thing  
at the end of church? Free money?  
You're doing it wrong if it's free money.  
Not the like, the collection.  
The collection, I'm not going to say the tipping, which is not.  
Yeah.  
Can I just ask, what is the tax implication  
of the free money?  
Free money?  
All right.  
That is it.  
That is all of our facts. Thank you so much for listening.  
If you'd like to get in contact with any of us

**[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 497: No Such Thing As Oceans Eleven with Puffins**

about the things that we have said over the course of this podcast,  
we can be found on our Twitter accounts.

I'm on at Shriverland.

James.

At Andrew Hunter and Greg.

Greg underscore Jenner.

Or you can go to our group account, which is at  
no such thing. Go to our website.

No such thing as a fish.com.

All of our previous episodes are up there.

Oh, wow. Quite a few. Okay, cool.

Join them. They sound fun.

And we will be back again next week  
with another episode.

Thank you so much, Soho Theatre.

That was awesome. Thank you, Greg.

We will be back again as I say next week.

Goodbye!