

All Fools Day

At the risk of appearing boring, we offer more pearls of useless information. This month on the subject of April Fools.

The origins of the practice of playing practical jokes before 12 noon on 1st April are unknown. It is however very old and world-wide. In France they refer to the 'April Fish' and in Scotland to the 'Cuckoo' and 'Hunting the Gowk'. In Hindu countries they celebrate, if that's the correct word, the 'Huli Festival on 31st March.

In any event, 'April Fools' is tied up with spring festivals, probably of Persian or Roman origin. The culmination of the festivities welcoming the Spring Equinox, when the sun is directly above the equator.

Some jokes can be inconvenient:

As a schoolboy I 'borrowed' my housemaster's typewriter, forged his signature, and had the note read out at assembly. The result was 250 boys clogging the corridors waiting to be interviewed by the teacher who was away in London.

Some jokes are infuriating:

A few years ago we took a party of boys to Holland. They were asked to be up and dressed by 7am ready for a full day's visit. The hotel laid on breakfast and the coach duly arrived, picked up its cargo of sleepy lads, drove round the block and tipped out the April Fools.

Some jokes are definitely expensive.

It had been decided to remove the bust of the College founder from its plinth in the Principal's garden, to a rather more conspicuous location. Being too awkward for four of us to get a grip of, we laid it reverently on a park bench. All went well until we encountered a flight of steps. The bench dipped. The bust slowly slid off the end of the bench and hit the edge of a step, severing head from shoulders. £10 each from a student grant was a lot of money in those days!

Howard Brayton

April 1975