

## Witney Way Lent and Easter 2015

### Lists

We recently had occasion to visit Customer Services in a large store. As we rounded the end of the Sale rail, I remarked, "Look, there's no-one in the queue." Immediately I thought, that's not right; if there is no-one there, there can *be* no queue. I should have said, "Look, there's no queue." Similarly, I suggest, you cannot have a list, if there are no items on it. Maybe it's true, I *am* a pedant when it comes to the use, or abuse, of my beloved English language.

The Oxford English Dictionary (which is of course a list in itself!) has a lot to 'say' about *list*, including Medieval references to ears and hearing, hence listen; a strip, border, edge, and boundary, particularly with reference to cloth, but also to skin. However, what we are (at least I am) interested in here is, "A *catalogue or roll of names, figures, works or the like - to catalogue, register.*" We are offered lists of interesting or useless information from all manner of sources. For example, the *i* newspaper prints a daily top ten list (Worst-dressed men in Britain, The World's best place to retire, The most popular word of 2014 ...) We have the New Year's Honours list, the Rich list, the Electoral Roll, Wish lists, To Do lists, Mailing lists, and Shopping lists ... I can't *shop* without a list. I write a daily To Do list. I keep electronic lists of names, addresses and telephone numbers; lists of books read; sayings and quotations... "*I've got a little list - I've got a little list.*"<sup>(1)</sup> I am even registered with the Office for National Statistics <sup>(2)</sup> which collates factual lists of anything and everything, so that politicians can 'spin' them to their own advantage! As Benjamin Disraeli once famously remarked, "There are lies, damned lies and statistics."\* Did you know that the best-selling book of 2014 was The Guinness Book of Records? isn't that but a list of the biggest, longest, fastest, most interesting and most boring ...? 'The Book of Lists' <sup>(3)</sup> has sold over eight million copies worldwide! Of course it's probably quicker to go on-line and Google [listverse.com](http://listverse.com), where again you can find top ten lists of anything and everything. Even our much loved and sorely missed Bishop John Pritchard, published his book 'Ten' in 2014, comprising 17 lists of 10 items each, suggesting "Why Christianity Makes Sense." <sup>(4)</sup>

The Bible too contains many lists, for example: seven days of creation (well technically six, resting the seventh!) (Genesis 1:1 - 2:3) the descendants of Adam (Genesis 5:1-32) I wonder if Noah kept a list on a stone tablet of "... every living thing and all flesh..." (Genesis 6:19) as they "...went in two by two...", Zoologists would have found it useful; the twelve Tribes of Israel (Genesis Chapter 49) the ten Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7:14 to 11:36) the ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 &

Deuteronomy 5:4-21) the conflicting genealogies of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17 & Luke 3 23:38) the Beatitudes, (Matthew 5:3-11) the twelve Disciples / Apostles and so on. There's more, at: [theoldtimegospel.org/lists](http://theoldtimegospel.org/lists)

You might, or might not of course, find the other Biblical uses of the word *list* of interest. "The wind bloweth where it listeth ..." (John 3:8) In the C16, *list* was used to mean pleasure, liking, care or desire, so the wind was blowing in any direction it chose, or in no particular direction. "... whithersoever the governor listeth." (James 3:4) suggests that the one steering knows exactly where he is going, and is taking the appropriate action. *List* is also listed as, 'to careen, heel, or incline to one side.' As I write this piece, the massive cargo ship *Hoegh Osaka* lies at a list of 52 degrees to starboard, on Bramble sandbank in the Solent. "*The captain ... has been praised after deliberately running it aground ... when it started listing to one side.*"

The *list* in jousting, was the demarcation of the area of display, in fact, the *lists* became the name for jousting. 'A dark horse ... which St. James had never even observed at the list, rushing past the grandstand in sweeping triumph' (5) A similar word, *tilt*, was the barrier erected between, and parallel to, the opposing combatants. So jousting was also known as the tilts, where the opponents raised or lowered (tilted) their lances. I only mention this latter, because I also keep a list of words which have changed their meaning over time. Like '... the *fear* of the Lord ...' meant respect, adoration, reverence, *not* being frightened. "*Prevent* us O Lord ..." didn't mean to get in the way of, but 'to go before with spiritual guidance.' And the original Biblical word translated from Greek and Hebrew as *sin*, originated in archery, and meant, 'to hit the target, but to miss the "gold" at the centre.

I could go on! But as we continue our endless fascination with lists, let's let the Bard have the last word,

"... to ears of flesh and blood. *List, list, O, list!*"(6)

\* Attributed to Mark Twain

(1) W.S. Gilbert, *Mikado*

(2) [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

(3) Wallechinsky D & Wallace A, *The Book of Lists*, Canongate, Edinburgh 2004

(4) Pritchard J, *Ten*, SPCK London 2014

(5) Disraeli Benjamin, *The Young Duke*

(6) Shakespeare William *Hamlet*

Howard Brayton