ARBiT
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A Global Stand Against Gender-Based Violence

In 1999, the United Nations officially designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, marking a global commitment to address gender-based abuse in all its forms. The date commemorates the assassination of the Mirabal sisters, political activists from the Dominican Republic who were murdered in 1960 for opposing dictatorship, symbolising resistance against oppression. The UN resolution urged governments, institutions, and civil society to create awareness and strengthen protections for women. Since then, the day has become a key moment to highlight issues like domestic violence, harassment, trafficking, and inequality, pushing for reforms worldwide.

राष्ट्रदूत
WEDNESDAY
25 November 2026
A-B

#KILLING TAXES

The Window Tax of 1696

Poor could not afford to pay the tax. To avoid paying higher taxes, some homeowners bricked up their windows



In 1696, England introduced a peculiar form of taxation known as the window tax. This tax, which imposed a levy based on the number of windows in a property, was intended to generate revenue for the government. However, it ended up having unintended social consequences, particularly for the poor. The window tax was controversial not only because of its unusual nature but also because of the way it disproportionately affected lower-income families.

How the Tax Worked

The window tax worked on a tiered system, with different tax rates based on the number of windows in a building. Homes with fewer than ten windows were taxed at a lower rate, while those with more windows were taxed more heavily. Those with more than twenty windows faced the highest rates.

Although the tax was intended to target wealthier individuals and large property owners, it didn't work out that way in practice. The tax affected everyone who had windows, regardless of their social class, and some people, especially the poor, could not afford to pay the tax. To avoid paying higher taxes, some homeowners bricked up their windows, effectively hiding them to reduce their taxable window count.

The Unintended Consequences

The window tax, despite its well-meaning intentions, had devastating effects on the poorer classes. For the wealthy, the tax was simply another cost of owning a large home. However, for the poor, who often lived in small, poorly built houses, the consequences were much more severe. For many, the decision to brick up windows was not just an economic choice, it was a necessity. In an effort to save money, poor families often had to block their windows entirely, reducing the amount of natural light and ventilation in their homes. This created dark, damp, and unhealthy living conditions. Without adequate ventilation and light, the risk of diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other respiratory conditions increased significantly. The poor, already struggling to make ends meet, were now living in homes that were not only uncomfortable but also more dangerous to their health.

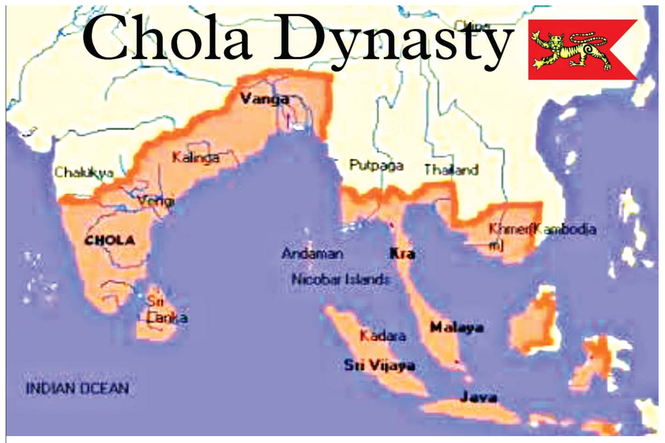
The window tax also indirectly discouraged the building of homes that might be more suited to the needs of the poor. Since windows were taxed based on the number in a property, there was less incentive to build homes that would provide adequate light and air. Instead, builders and landlords focused on keeping the number of windows to a minimum, leading to substandard living conditions for those who could least afford them.

Public Outcry and the End of the Tax

Over time, the window tax became increasingly unpopular, especially among the poor. The effects on their health and living conditions were widely recognized, and the public began to demand reform. Critics argued that the tax was not only unfair but also harmful to public health. The window tax was seen as a tax on basic human needs, natural light and fresh air, and its implementation seemed out of touch with the realities of life for ordinary people.

In 1851, the government finally repealed the window tax after it became clear that it was causing more harm than good. By then, many homes had been significantly altered, with windows bricked up to avoid the tax, leaving behind a legacy of dark, unhealthy homes.





This process of renaming was reinforced during the colonial period, especially as the British consolidated their presence along the coast. Ports such as Calcutta (now Kolkata) became key administrative and naval centers, and ships built or stationed in India were often given regional names. One such vessel, reportedly associated with early 19th-century naval activity, carried the name HMS Malabar, reflecting the broader colonial practice of naming ships after Indian coastal regions.

From Cholamandalam to Coromandel



Bulbul Joshi

The name "Coromandel" carries within it a long and unexpected history, one that begins on the southeastern coast of India and, through centuries of maritime contact, echoes all the way to the Pacific islands of New Zealand.

At its root lies the Tamil region historically known as Cholamandalam, the land associated with the powerful Chola dynasty. The Cholas were among the most formidable maritime powers of the early medieval world, extending influence across the Bay of Bengal and establishing trade and cultural networks that reached Southeast Asia. Their naval presence made the Tamil coast a central hub in the Indian Ocean world.

When European traders and explorers arrived, first the Portuguese, later the Dutch and British, they encountered this region's name but struggled with its pronunciation. "Cholamandalam" gradually transformed through mishearing and linguistic simplification into "Coromandel," a name that Europeans applied broadly to the entire eastern coastline of India. What began as a precise regional identity became, in European usage, a generalized geographic label.

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By late 1530, the Coromandel Coast was home to three Portuguese settlements at Negapatão, São Tomé de Meliapore, and Paliacate. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Coromandel Coast was the scene of rivalries among European powers for control of the India trade. The British established themselves at Fort St. George (Madras) and Masulipatnam, the Dutch at Pulicat, Sadras, the Belgians at Covelong, the French at Pondicherry, Karaikal and Nizampatnam, the Danish in Dansborg or Tranquebar.

The Coromandel Coast supplied Indian Muslim eunuchs to the Thai palace and court of Siam (modern Thailand). The Thai at times asked eunuchs from China to visit the court in Thailand and advise them on court ritual since they held them in high regard.

Eventually, the British won out, although France retained the tiny enclaves of Pondichéry and Karaikal until 1954. Chinese lacquer goods, including boxes, screens, and chests, became known as "Coromandel" goods in the 18th century, because many Chinese exports were consolidated at the Coromandel ports.

By the early 19th century, the name "Coromandel" was no longer confined to India. British maritime expansion carried it across the oceans. In 1820, a ship named Coromandel reached the waters of the Pacific, sailing near what Europeans called Port Jackson in Australia before continuing its journeys through the wider region. Ships like these often served multiple roles, transport, trade, and migration, and their names traveled with them as markers of empire.

As British exploration intensified in the southern hemisphere, names from ships frequently became embedded in local geography. One of the most significant urban centers in this network was Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, and nearby regions such as the Coromandel Peninsula. The peninsula's name directly reflects this maritime naming tradition, derived from ships that once bore the name "Coromandel."

In some accounts, the ship's name was adopted informally by sailors and colonial administrators who found it easier to use than unfamiliar indigenous names. Over time, "Coromandel" became fixed in maps and official records, detached from its Tamil origins and reattached to a completely different geography in the Pacific.

There is also a deeper linguistic story beneath this transformation. The difficulty European sailors faced in pronouncing "Cholamandalam" contributed to its gradual reshaping. What began as a phonetic adaptation in the Indian Ocean world became a permanent colonial label that traveled thousands of miles.

This journey of a name, from Tamil agricultural heartland to global maritime vocabulary, reflects the nature of the early modern oceanic world. Ships were not just carriers of goods and people; they were carriers of language, memory, and identity. The Coromandel name, born from a Chola-era landscape, became part of British naval tradition and eventually geography in New Zealand.

Thus, when we look at a map of New Zealand and see the Coromandel Peninsula, we are indirectly witnessing a distant echo of the Chola maritime world. It is a reminder that oceans do not separate histories, they connect them. And sometimes, a single mispronounced word can travel farther than empires, reshaping the map of the world in its wake. Today, it is a wonder that a Coromandel exists in a wholely different country, and it's one of the most visited tourist attractions of the country. A two hour drive from Auckland city, the stunning Coromandel Peninsula is a favourite holiday destination with locals. There are over 400 kms of picturesque coastline, beaches and coves, as well as countless bush-clad walkways. Further inland, you'll find rugged, volcanic hills, cloaked in rainforest, containing the world's tallest fern trees and perfect for hiking.

Because of the region's rustic, unspoilt nature, the area is a magnet for creative types, who arrive here in search of inspiration and never leave. History lovers, too, are attracted by the Coromandel's rich sense of past, particularly evident in the architecture of many of the region's colonial buildings.

Historic Towns

The largest of the Peninsula's towns is Thames, founded on the site of New Zealand's first gold rush in the early 1850s. Many of the buildings that line the streets still bear witness to the town's mining legacy and a truly 'golden' age. Out of town, a three hour walk on 'Rocky's Goldmine Trail' will reward you with breathtaking views of the Firth of Thames, the native forests and numerous swimming holes.

Another historic town of note is Coromandel itself, which also prospered during the gold rush. There are some good camping and picnic areas here, as well as arts and crafts shops, and the town is home to Driving Creek Railway; New Zealand's only narrow-gauge mountain track. For walkers and mountain bikers, the dazzling Coromandel Coastal Walkway is not to be missed.

The town of Whitianga is a good base from which to explore Mercury Bay; a hotspot (quite literally!) known for its nearby attractions, Cathedral Cove and Hot Water Beach. Cathedral Cove is an ideal spot for kayaking, swimming, snorkelling and diving. The pohutukawa trees provide welcome shade, from which you can admire the cove's sparkling, white sands and impressive, rocky arches. The Hahei Coastal Walkway track starts at the northern end of Hahei beach and is a 45 minute walk, giving you access to Stingray Bay and Gemstone Bay before you reach the gorgeous sandy beach at Cathedral Cove.

Cathedral Cove is one of the most photographed natural attractions in New Zealand, situated just to the north between Cooks Beach and Hahei. A natural sandstone arch separates two golden beaches, accessible only by boat or a short walk from Hahei. Hot Water Beach definitely lives up to its name. For two hours either side of low tide, visitors can create their own hot pools by digging into the sands; the springs bubbling up underneath are a 'moving' reminder of the beach's fascinating, volcanic past.

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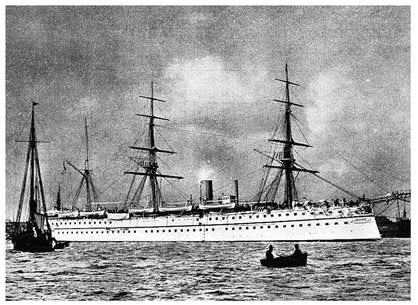


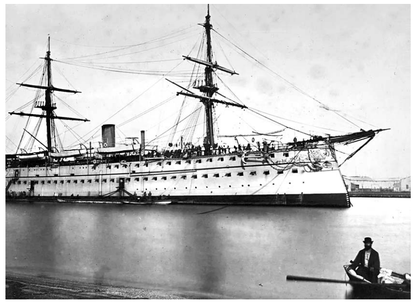




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#WORDS WITH A PAST

"Toe the line!"

The Bizarre Origins of Everyday Language

We use thousands of words every day without thinking twice about where they come from. But some of the most ordinary words, "toe the line," "testify," "sandwich," and "bonfire," have bizarre, surprising, and even slightly scandalous backstories. From courtrooms and card tables to pagan fires and parliamentary duels, here's a deep dive into the curious origins and unexpected fun facts behind these four common terms.

1. Toe the Line - When Politics Was a Sword Fight Waiting to Happen

Modern meaning: To conform to rules or behave appropriately

Origin: This phrase dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries in both military drills and athletics, where men would literally place their toes on a line before beginning a race or standing at attention.

The Weird Fun Fact: In British Parliament, two red lines are painted on the debating chamber floor, each exactly two sword lengths apart. This tradition stems from a time when MPs carried swords, and these lines prevented them from physically attacking one another during heated debates. When delivering speeches, members were expected to "toe the line," meaning to stay behind it and behave civilly.

So, the next time someone tells you to "toe the line," just imagine 18th-century politicians biting their tongues while gripping sword hilts.

2. Testify - Swearing on Something a Bit... Personal

Modern meaning: To give legal or religious evidence; to bear witness.

Origin: The word comes from the Latin *testis*, meaning "witness." This gave rise to testificare ("to bear witness") and eventually the English "testify."

The Weird Fun Fact: There's a long-standing (and likely mythical) claim that Roman men swore oaths by placing their hands on their testicles, which share the same Latin root as "testify." While that's debated, the Bible offers something even more bizarre: in Genesis 24:2, Abrahaham has his servant swear an oath by placing his hand under Abraham's thigh, a euphemism, many scholars believe, for his genitals. In ancient times, the seat of life and lineage was considered sacred, making such oaths spiritually binding. In other words, "testify" may have once involved a very literal commitment to truth, with some very awkward hand placements.





3. Sandwich - A Snack That Named a Set of Islands

Modern meaning: A food item consisting of fillings between slices of bread.

Origin: Named after John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, an English nobleman in the 1700s. The Earl, an obsessive gambler, allegedly asked for meat between slices of bread so that he wouldn't have to leave the card table or get his hands greasy.

The Weird Fun Fact: Though the Earl made the name famous, the idea of sandwiching food goes way back, ancient Middle Eastern and Jewish cultures had similar food traditions long before. Still, Montagu's influence stuck, and in 1778, his legacy reached far beyond lunch: Captain James Cook named the Hawaiian Islands the "Sandwich Islands" in the Earl's honour, after receiving his patronage.

So, yes, one man's snack attack gave us a food category and renamed paradise.

4. Bonfire - When Burning Bones Was a Good Time

Modern meaning: A large open fire, often for celebration or gathering.

Origin: "Bonfire" comes from Middle English "bone fire," a fire where actual bones were burned, usually in ritualistic or religious ceremonies.

The Weird Fun Fact: During ancient Celtic festivals like Samhain (a precursor to Halloween), villagers would light massive fires to burn the bones of animals as part of a spiritual rite. Later, during the Reformation and beyond, these fires took a more political turn, on Guy Fawkes Night in 17th-century England, people burned effigies (and sometimes, actual criminals) as a public display of loyalty to the Crown.

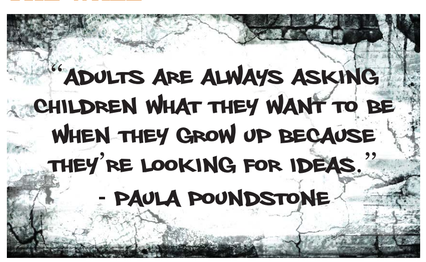
The next time you're roasting marshmallows, remember: bonfires once meant fire, bones, politics, and maybe, a witch trial or two.

Final Thoughts: The Words We Carry

Words are more than just sounds, they're cultural time capsules, each carrying bits of forgotten customs, rituals, and societal quirks. Whether you're following the rules ("toe the line"), giving a courtroom statement ("testify"), biting into a BLT ("sandwich"), or watching sparks fly at a festival ("bonfire"), you're participating in centuries-old traditions, some stranger than fiction.

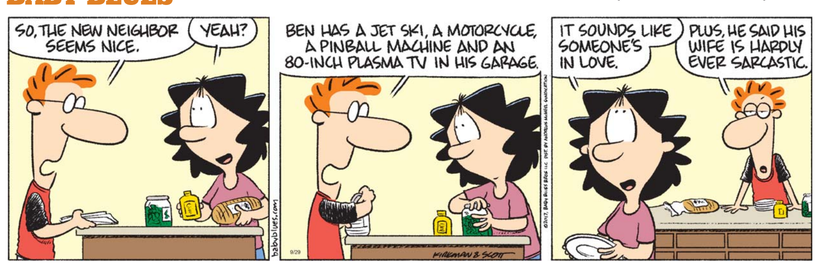


THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

