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Episode #040

April Fool's Day

March 31, 2020



[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:10] The show where you can improve your English while learning fascinating things about the world.

[00:00:17] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:00:19] It's Tuesday, March the 31st, which makes tomorrow the 1st of April, April Fool's day, the day where people, newspapers, and companies try to play tricks on the general public.

[00:00:36] So that is the subject of today's podcast - April Fool's day.

[00:00:41] We'll talk a bit about where it came from, then we'll talk about some of the best and funniest April Fool's stories out there.



[00:00:52] We'll also talk about a time when an April Fool's joke went badly wrong.

[00:00:59] Before we get right into it though, let me just take a minute to remind those of you listening to the podcast on Spotify, Google Podcasts, iVoox, or wherever you get your podcasts that you can find a copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for every single podcast over on our website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:24] If you haven't already checked them out, the transcript is super helpful for following every single word of the podcast.

[00:01:32] And the key vocabulary explains the harder words and phrases, so you will understand every single word, you won't miss a thing, and you will build up your vocabulary at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:01:48] If you're interested in checking this out, and I'd certainly recommend you do, then you should head to leonardoenglish.com/subscribe and join curious minds from all over the world.

[00:02:02] Okay.

[00:02:02] Let's talk about April Fool's.

[00:02:07] Firstly, the exact [origins¹](#) of this particular festival aren't actually fully known, but there are a few theories about where it came from.

¹ the beginning or cause of something



[00:02:21] The tradition of playing [practical jokes](#)² on people, and generally causing trouble can be [traced](#)³ back all the way to the Roman [era](#)⁴, and historians believe it's related to celebrating the coming of spring.

[00:02:39] I guess it was a sort of fun way to celebrate the arrival of a new season.

[00:02:46] And we have records of people [tricking](#)⁵ others on April the first that [date back](#)⁶ over 300 years now.

[00:02:57] There's a record of something called "Fooles Holy day" on April the first 1698 and on this day, on the 1st of April, 1698, people were invited to go and see something called 'the washing of the lions' at the Tower of London.

[00:03:19] Of course, that sounded quite exciting, and when these people [turned up](#)⁷ at the Tower of London and asked to see the lions being washed, the guards there gave out a mighty laugh, and that was the first record of an April Fool's [prank](#)⁸, of an April Fool's joke.

² a joke that makes someone seem silly and involves a physical action rather than words

³ to find the origin of something

⁴ a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical

⁵ an action that is intended to deceive, either as a way of cheating someone, or as a joke or form of entertainment

⁶ to have existed for a particular length of time or since a particular time

⁷ arrives at

⁸ a trick that is intended to be funny but not to cause harm or damage



[00:03:42] You might think "lions at the Tower of London? Who would believe that?"

[00:03:48] But actually that wasn't the joke.

[00:03:50] There were some lions at the Tower of London.

[00:03:54] The joke was that there would be some kind of public washing of the lions.

[00:04:00] Obviously lions wouldn't be particularly [keen](#)⁹ on being washed.

[00:04:05] The joke [proved](#)¹⁰ so popular that it was played almost every year.

[00:04:12] Of course, this was before any kind of [mass media](#)¹¹, even before mass readership of newspapers, before mass [circulation](#)¹² of newspapers, so they could safely play the same old joke year after year.

[00:04:30] Nowadays, some form of April Fool's is celebrated in lots of different countries in slightly different ways.

[00:04:40] In France, for example, they have 'Poisson d'Avril', the April fish, where you try to stick a paper fish onto the back of someone else.

⁹ very interested, eager, or wanting (to do) something very much

¹⁰ to show a particular result after a period of time

¹¹ newspapers, television, radio, and the internet

¹² the number of people that a newspaper or magazine is regularly sold to



April Fool's Day

[00:04:53] You might say that I'm **biased**¹³ on this one, being British, but no country really **engages**¹⁴ with the idea of April Fool's as much as the UK does.

[00:05:07] In the past 50 years in the UK it has become a tradition that has been **embraced**¹⁵ by almost all of the major newspapers, TV channels, radio stations, and now brands, companies.

[00:05:24] Traditionally, they will publish a news story, or a story, an announcement, that is completely fake and unbelievable and often quite funny.

[00:05:36] This will be hidden within the newspaper or TV programme.

[00:05:40] And it's always quite a fun game on April the first to go through various newspapers and try to **spot**¹⁶ the fake ones, to try and find the ones that are the jokes.

[00:05:55] What I want to do now though, is talk about three of the best, three of my favourite, April Fool's jokes, and then we'll end, as I said, with the story of an April Fool's joke that goes wrong.

¹³ preferring or disliking someone or something more than someone or something else, in a way that means that they are treated unfairly

¹⁴ involves itself with

¹⁵ to accept something enthusiastically

¹⁶ find



[00:06:09] So to start with, one of the first mass [broadcast](#)¹⁷ April Fool's jokes was by the BBC, and this was in 1957.

[00:06:21] Now, let me just start with a little bit of [background](#)¹⁸ for you.

[00:06:26] The BBC has a show called Panorama, which is a serious news reporting show.

[00:06:34] It normally does research and investigations into important issues, so it's definitely not a joke show.

[00:06:42] It's definitely not a comedy show.

[00:06:45] Anyway, in 1957 Panorama did a show about how spaghetti was made in Switzerland.

[00:06:55] The show talks about spaghetti farming in Switzerland and shows how spaghetti is farmed by being cut from trees like apples.

[00:07:09] You can see a video of happy farmers picking the spaghetti from the trees, and then laying it out to dry in the warm [Alpine](#)¹⁹ sun.

¹⁷ to send out a programme on television or radio

¹⁸ the set of conditions that existed before a particular event, or information about them which helps to explain the event

¹⁹ relating to the Alps (the mountain range)



[00:07:21] The Panorama show also talks about how this year, in 1957, it has been a very good year for spaghetti because a tiny little creature that used to eat the spaghetti while it was on the trees has disappeared, and this has led to a [bumper²⁰ harvest²¹](#), a really successful time, for the Swiss spaghetti farmers.

[00:07:51] Now you will, I guess, recognise that this is completely [made up²²](#).

[00:07:58] It's a joke.

[00:07:59] Spaghetti does not grow on trees and it is certainly not [harvested](#) high up in the hills in Switzerland.

[00:08:08] You might think, "surely British people would never have believed that".

[00:08:13] Well, it turns out that quite a few people did believe it, and they wrote into the BBC to ask where they could buy their own spaghetti bush.

[00:08:25] Spaghetti, you see, was still quite an [exotic²³ dish²⁴](#) in the UK in 1957 and a lot of people wouldn't really have known anything about it.

²⁰ very large

²¹ the time of year when crops are cut and collected from the fields, or the activity of cutting and collecting them, or the crops that are cut and collected

²² invented, not true

²³ unusual and exciting because of coming (or seeming to come) from far away, especially a tropical country

²⁴ meal



[00:08:40] This might be hard for you to believe, especially for the Italians among you, but it is true.

[00:08:49] Our second story, which was actually published in a bit of a [ridiculous](#)²⁵ newspaper called The Daily Star, but I wanted to share with you because it [features](#)²⁶ two things that are pretty common in British [pop culture](#)²⁷.

[00:09:07] Firstly, the NHS, the National Health Service, and secondly beer.

[00:09:16] Last year, 2019, The Daily Star published an article that stated that people in Britain will be able to be given beer by the NHS if they can [convince](#)²⁸ their doctor that they are suffering from tiredness.

[00:09:36] That if you go to the doctor and say that you're feeling tired the doctor can write you a [prescription](#)²⁹ for beer and you can get that free from the national health service.

²⁵ stupid or unreasonable and deserving to be laughed at

²⁶ involves

²⁷ music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people

²⁸ to persuade someone or make someone certain

²⁹ a piece of paper on which a doctor writes the details of the medicine or drugs that someone needs



[00:09:49] The article said that the beer would be given to patients through an [intravenous³⁰ drip³¹](#), so through a [tube³²](#) directly into their arm, not in a [pint³³](#) glass.

[00:10:03] I have no doubt that this idea was pretty popular with some of the readers of the newspaper, but I should of course add it was completely untrue, completely fake.

[00:10:16] Our third example is a particularly clever one.

[00:10:21] The one from The Daily Star about the beer and the NHS was pretty stupid, but this one is quite the opposite.

[00:10:30] It's quite a [highbrow³⁴](#) joke, whereas The Daily Star was definitely what we would call [lowbrow³⁵](#).

[00:10:38] So our third example comes from the BBC again, but this time it is from BBC radio.

[00:10:45] This April Fool's joke is from 1976.

³⁰ into or connected to a vein

³¹ a method of slowly giving someone liquid medicine or food through a tube into a vein, or a piece of equipment for doing this

³² a long, hollow cylinder of plastic, metal, rubber, or glass, used for moving or containing liquids or gases

³³ a measure for liquid equal to about half a litre, used as a typical measure for beer

³⁴ (of books, plays, etc.) involving serious and complicated or artistic ideas, or (of people) interested in serious and complicated subjects

³⁵ (of entertainment) not complicated or demanding much intelligence to be understood



[00:10:50] On Radio Two, a famous British [astronomer](#)³⁶, an expert in the stars and the planets, called Patrick Moore had an important message for his listeners.

[00:11:04] Moore told his listeners that the planet Pluto was going to pass the planet Jupiter, and this [unique](#)³⁷ event would have a strange impact on [gravity](#)³⁸ on Earth.

[00:11:19] He said that at [precisely](#)³⁹ 9:47 in the morning, 9:47 AM, people on Earth would feel just a little bit lighter.

[00:11:33] And he suggested to people that if they jumped in the air they would feel a strange [floating](#)⁴⁰ [sensation](#)⁴¹ as if they were flying, as if they were in space.

[00:11:46] Of course, this was a joke, another April Fool's, however many people phoned in to the BBC to say that the experiment had indeed worked.

[00:11:59] They had jumped and felt this strange [floating sensation](#).

³⁶ someone who studies astronomy

³⁷ being the only existing one of its type or, more generally, unusual, or special in some way

³⁸ the force that attracts objects towards one another, especially the force that makes things fall to the ground

³⁹ exactly

⁴⁰ not fixed in one position, place, or level

⁴¹ the ability to feel something physically, especially by touching, or a physical feeling that results from this ability



[00:12:06] One woman even called in to say that she and her 11 friends had been lifted from their chairs and [floated](#) around the room in the air.

[00:12:20] The mind really can play strange tricks on you.

[00:12:26] Now, April Fool's jokes aren't always met with fun and laughter, and sometimes they go wrong.

[00:12:35] Google is famous for playing jokes on its users and the problem comes when people don't realise that they are a joke.

[00:12:47] In 2016 Google announced that within Gmail, the email provider, there would be a button called 'microphone drop send', 'Mic drop send', which would allow you to send your email, but it would also insert a GIF, a funny moving image, of a [minion](#)⁴² from the Despicable Me series.

[00:13:15] I guess if you've seen the Despicable Me series you'll know what I mean.

[00:13:20] Basically, it was a [functionality](#)⁴³ that would send an email and attach a funny GIF in there when you pressed send.

[00:13:30] And they didn't just write an announcement about it, they actually inserted this [functionality](#) within Gmail.

⁴² a main character from the Despicable Me series

⁴³ any or all of the operations performed by a piece of equipment or a software program



[00:13:40] Some people didn't realise that this was a different button and responded with this button in serious emails, emails to their bosses, colleagues, important partners and clients about serious topics.

[00:13:58] Obviously they weren't happy when they realised that Gmail had inserted a funny GIF in their email, and there were several people who took to Twitter and other social networks to say that they had lost their jobs, they'd lost important clients, and worse.

[00:14:17] One person shared an email that had accidentally been sent using this GIF about [funeral⁴⁴](#) arrangements.

[00:14:27] Obviously that's not the kind of email that you want to be putting funny GIFs in.

[00:14:33] So, April Fool's jokes don't always go right, and people and companies nowadays need to be pretty careful.

[00:14:42] This is even more the case in the [era](#) of [so-called⁴⁵](#) "fake news" where politicians claim that news is fake, completely [made up](#), especially if it doesn't [reflect⁴⁶](#) positively on their own performance.

⁴⁴ a (usually religious) ceremony for burying or burning the body of a dead person

⁴⁵ used to show that you think a word that is used to describe someone or something is not suitable or not correct

⁴⁶ to show, express, or be a sign of something



[00:14:59] All over the world, journalists are accused of writing fake news and so on the day when it is actually acceptable and funny to write fake news, newspapers have to be pretty careful.

[00:15:16] Indeed the past few years have seen newspapers be extra careful in this respect, making sure that the story is so unbelievable and sometimes even adding a little note in the article to confirm that it's a joke.

[00:15:34] Which is a bit of a [shame](#)⁴⁷ really, as it [spoils](#)⁴⁸ a lot of the fun.

[00:15:40] But in the [era](#) when stories like Donald Trump tries to buy Greenland or the story about the UK [declaring](#)⁴⁹ that it will now have a blue passport made by a company in France as one of the first moves after Brexit - both those stories are true, by the way - in an [era](#) when these kinds of stories are actually not April Fool's it's become [increasingly](#)⁵⁰ difficult to tell [fact](#)⁵¹ from [fiction](#)⁵².

⁴⁷ If something is described as a shame, it is disappointing or not satisfactory

⁴⁸ destroys or reduces the pleasure, interest, or beauty of something

⁴⁹ to announce something clearly, firmly, publicly, or officially

⁵⁰ to (make something) become larger in amount or size

⁵¹ truth

⁵² invented stories



[00:16:12] So if you are listening to this podcast on the day when it's released, the 31st of March, tomorrow it will be April Fool's day, and there will no doubt be a competition by newspapers, TV shows, and companies to [pull off](#)⁵³ the best April Fool's trick.

[00:16:33] So keep an eye out for it and let's hope that someone manages to [pull off](#) a joke that's quite as good as the documentary about spaghetti growing on trees.

[00:16:47] Okay then, that is it for today's episode.

[00:16:52] I hope that you are keeping safe wherever you are, and that you may even be using some of this time at home if you are spending time at home to improve your English.

[00:17:03] As always, I'd love to know what you thought of the show.

[00:17:06] You can email us at hi - hi- @leonardoenglish.com or you can say hello on Facebook, Instagram, or you could of course join the learn English with podcasts Facebook group.

[00:17:20] And as a final reminder, if you are looking for the transcript and key vocabulary to [turbocharge](#)⁵⁴ your English learning, you can find that and more information on how you can become a member of Leonardo English over on the website.

⁵³ manage to do

⁵⁴ speed up



[00:17:37] Members of Leonardo English also get access to all of our bonus podcasts - there's actually another bonus members-only podcast that came out today where we discussed the truth about pronunciation, which is a pretty cool topic.

[00:17:51] So go and check that out, that's at leonardoenglish.com.

[00:17:56] I'm Alastair Budge and you've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:18:03] Stay safe, and I will catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word

Definition

Origins

the beginning or cause of something

Practical jokes

a joke that makes someone seem silly and involves a physical action rather than words

Trace

to find the origin of something

Era

a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical

Tricking

an action that is intended to deceive, either as a way of cheating someone, or as a joke or form of entertainment

Date back

to have existed for a particular length of time or since a particular time

Turned up

arrives at

Prank

a trick that is intended to be funny but not to cause harm or damage

Keen

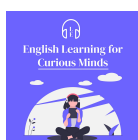
very interested, eager, or wanting (to do) something very much

Proved

to show a particular result after a period of time

Mass media

newspapers, television, radio, and the internet



Circulation	the number of people that a newspaper or magazine is regularly sold to
Biased	preferring or disliking someone or something more than someone or something else, in a way that means that they are treated unfairly
Engages	involves itself with
Embraced	to accept something enthusiastically
Spot	find
Broadcast	to send out a programme on television or radio
Background	the set of conditions that existed before a particular event, or information about them which helps to explain the event
Alpine	relating to the Alps (the mountain range)
Bumper	very large
Harvest	the time of year when crops are cut and collected from the fields, or the activity of cutting and collecting them, or the crops that are cut and collected
Made up	invented, not true
Exotic	unusual and exciting because of coming (or seeming to come) from far away, especially a tropical country



Dish	meal
Ridiculous	stupid or unreasonable and deserving to be laughed at
Features	involves
Pop culture	music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people
Convince	to persuade someone or make someone certain
Prescription	a piece of paper on which a doctor writes the details of the medicine or drugs that someone needs
Intravenous	into or connected to a vein
Drip	a method of slowly giving someone liquid medicine or food through a tube into a vein, or a piece of equipment for doing this
Tube	a long, hollow cylinder of plastic, metal, rubber, or glass, used for moving or containing liquids or gases
Pint	a measure for liquid equal to about half a litre, used as a typical measure for beer
Highbrow	(of books, plays, etc.) involving serious and complicated or artistic ideas, or (of people) interested in serious and complicated subjects



Lowbrow	(of entertainment) not complicated or demanding much intelligence to be understood
Astronomer	someone who studies astronomy
Unique	being the only existing one of its type or, more generally, unusual, or special in some way
Gravity	the force that attracts objects towards one another, especially the force that makes things fall to the ground
Precisely	exactly
Floating	not fixed in one position, place, or level
Sensation	the ability to feel something physically, especially by touching, or a physical feeling that results from this ability
Minion	a main character from the Despicable Me series
Functionality	any or all of the operations performed by a piece of equipment or a software program
Funeral	a (usually religious) ceremony for burying or burning the body of a dead person
So-called	used to show that you think a word that is used to describe someone or something is not suitable or not correct



Reflect	to show, express, or be a sign of something
Shame	If something is described as a shame, it is disappointing or not satisfactory
Spoils	destroys or reduces the pleasure, interest, or beauty of something
Declaring	to announce something clearly, firmly, publicly, or officially
Increasingly	to (make something) become larger in amount or size
Fact	truth
Fiction	invented stories
Pull off	manage to do
Turbocharge	speed up

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

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