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January Birthdays

In astrology, those born between January 1–19 are Capricorn's Goats. Goats are focused on lofty goals; these hardworking souls prevail with grit and resilience. Those born between January 20–31 are Water Bearers of Aquarius. Water Bearers are deep-thinking intellectuals, unafraid of exploring new ideas.

Ruth P. Bryan **January 24th**

New Year cont. from pg. 1

requesting that his lyrics be set to an old Scottish folk tune. The phrase *auld lang syne* roughly translates to “for old times’ sake,” and, fittingly, the nostalgic song is about preserving friendships. The tune was often sung at funerals, farewells, and other group celebrations. It finally made it to America in 1929, when the Guy Lombardo Orchestra played it at a New Year’s celebration in New York’s Roosevelt Hotel.

No New Year’s party is complete without a kiss at the stroke of midnight. In ancient times, the winter darkness was the domain of evil spirits. At New Year’s masquerade balls, scary masks were torn off at midnight, and a kiss was shared as an act of purification to chase away malign spirits. For centuries, New Year’s has been a time of celebration, nostalgia, and hope.



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**Braille
Literacy
Month**

Soup Month

**Fruitcake Toss
Day**

January 3

**Cuddle Up
Day**

January 6

**Make Your
Dream Come
True Day**

January 13

Popcorn Day

January 19

**Martin Luther
King Jr. Day**

January 21

Australia Day

January 28

(observed)

Puzzle Day

January 29

New Year, Lasting Traditions

Another new year begins, and all around the world people will be popping champagne, singing “Auld Lang Syne,” and kissing loved ones at the stroke of midnight. But just why, exactly, do we repeat these New Year’s traditions year after year?

Bubbly champagne is the drink of choice on New Year’s. Its invention is often credited to Dom Perignon, the Benedictine monk who oversaw the wine cellars of his abbey in the year 1697. While

others saw bubbles as a problematic sign that wine had spoiled, Perignon perfected the production of this new fermented drink known as champagne. From its beginnings in the abbey cellar, champagne was regularly used in religious celebrations such as consecrations and coronations. It then made the natural transition to secular celebrations, most notably at the soirees of the French aristocracy. As champagne became

cheaper and more accessible, it became the classiest beverage to offer during the holidays.

Scotland’s national poet Robert Burns penned the words to “Auld Lang Syne” in 1788 and sent them to the Scots Musical Museum,

continued on pg. 4



Healthy Skepticism

Once you hear that January 13 is International Skeptics Day, you might want to check the date for yourself, because some people claim that this holiday falls on October 13, while others insist that it always falls on the first Friday the 13th of the year. It turns out that a little skepticism is healthy.

Skepticism, after all, urges us to corroborate what we learn by seeking supporting facts. Too much skepticism, though, can lead to cynicism and denial, even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Similarly, a lack of skepticism can lead to naivete and being taken advantage of. When psychologists talk about

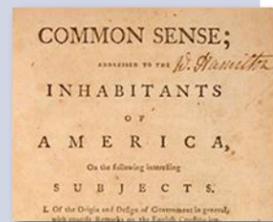
healthy skepticism, they are talking about that “Goldilocks” area—not too much, not too little, but just the right amount. If this sounds plausible to you, perhaps you should consider joining the Skeptics Society, a group fighting irrational belief. Then again, you might want to do a background check on those folks first.



Notable Quotable

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.”

~ Sherlock Holmes, fictional detective



A Birthday Mystery

Happy birthday to Sherlock Holmes, who is believed to have been born on January 6, 1854. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, never explicitly stated the date of his fictional detective’s birth, so how, exactly, have we arrived at this birth date?

The January 6 date was first asserted by Christopher Morley, an essayist and Sherlock Holmes superfan. Morley decided on the date after noticing Holmes’ penchant for quoting William Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night*. He deduced that Holmes’ birthday must fall on the twelfth night after Christmas, which is January 6. On that date in 1934, Morley arranged a meeting of the Baker Street Irregulars, a group of Sherlock

Burst Your Bubble

We wrap up the last Monday in January with Bubble Wrap Day, a day to pop to your heart’s content. Why do we get such satisfaction from popping bubble wrap? The answer may lie in the healing power of touch. Psychology professor Kathleen Dillon turned to the ancient Greeks for an answer, and she came up with a “fingering piece” or “worry stone,” often a

Holmes scholar who gathered to enjoy all things Sherlockian, including lectures, dinners, cocktail parties, and performances.

Sherlock Holmes scholar William S. Baring-Gould corroborates the January 6 date in a roundabout fashion. He points out that in Doyle’s final Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Valley of Fear*, Holmes awakes very cranky on January 7. Why is he cranky? He was up late celebrating his birthday. However, many attest that this is all rather shoddy detective work.

Most fans of Sherlock Homes agree that Holmes was born in the year 1854, for in a 1914 tale, Holmes was described as 60 years old. That much is elementary.

smooth stone carried in a pocket. Rubbing the stone with one’s fingers brought about a soothing sense of calm. Keeping our fingers busy, it seems, has an intensely calming effect. So, too, does popping bubble wrap. When we are stressed, our muscles tense. Tiny actions such as rubbing stones or popping bubble wrap release nervous energy and increase calm.

Making Sense

In January of 1776, just months before America made its Declaration of Independence, American propagandist Thomas Paine published his pamphlet *Common Sense*. In *Common Sense*, Paine set forth a list of compelling reasons for independence. He argued that colonists had fled to America seeking peace from violent oppression and self-realization from monstrous tyranny. Many historians believe that Paine’s pamphlet was the glue that united average folk with American political leaders, turning a colonial squabble into a full-fledged war. Paine’s 47-page pamphlet sold 500,000 copies. Although it was published anonymously, Paine’s name would enter history alongside heroes like Washington and Revere.

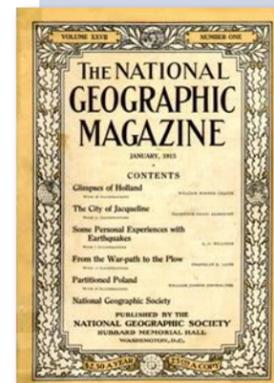
A History of Exploration

On January 13, 1888, an elite group of 33 explorers, scientists, academics, and wealthy financiers met at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C., with a common goal: “the increase and diffusion of geographical knowledge.” Their organization was officially incorporated two weeks later, on January 27, as the National Geographic Society.

It took nine months for National Geographic to publish its first magazine, and it was not meant for a popular audience. It was a scholarly journal filled with short, technical

articles mailed to only 165 charter members. Then in 1899, Society president Alexander Graham Bell hired Gilbert H. Grosvenor as the magazine’s full-time editor. Grosvenor changed the publication from a stodgy, scholarly journal into a popular magazine full of general interest articles and full-color photography. Its images were so striking and beautiful that circulation grew from just 1,000 to over two million. Thanks to these efforts, Grosvenor became known as one of the “fathers” of photojournalism.

The *National Geographic* magazine is certainly the Society’s most important and well-known outlet for spreading knowledge, and all revenue from the magazine is used to sponsor new expeditions and research. The National Geographic Society has aided some of the world’s most fascinating explorations: Jacques Cousteau’s dives to the deepest parts of the seas, Hiram Bingham’s uncovering of Machu Picchu, and Jane Goodall’s communes with chimpanzees. For over 130 years, National Geographic has stood by its founding motto.



Notable Quotable

“Exploration is really the essence of the human spirit.”

~ Frank Borman, NASA astronaut

More to Explore

Can you match the discovery to its discoverer?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. King Tut’s tomb | A. Mary Leakey |
| 2. The wreck of the Titanic | B. Richard Byrd |
| 3. Ancestral skulls at Olduvai Gorge | C. Robert Ballard |
| 4. First flight over South Pole | D. Howard Carter |

ANSWERS: 1, D; 2, C; 3, A; 4, B

A Life in Words

Amazing. Stupendous. Astounding. Those are just a few ways to describe Thesaurus Day on January 18. This day commemorates the birth of Peter Mark Roget, who published the world’s first thesaurus in 1852. Roget enjoyed making lists as a young

boy but then moved on to a life of medicine and science. However, he never forgot his passion for words. In 1840, Roget retired from medicine and spent the rest of his life on his dictionary of synonyms, which he called *Roget’s Thesaurus*. His

thesaurus was originally organized not alphabetically, but by concepts like *Space*, *Matter*, *Intellect*, and *Existence*. His handy tome has never been out of print and has sold more than 40 million copies—a vast and multitudinous number.

