

70 years – 70 ‘things’ that tell our story

Paula Kitching

As part of the Historical Association’s recognition of our patron the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee The Historical Association asked our members and followers to put together a collection of 70 ‘things’ that tell the story of the last 70 years: how the UK and the world have changed; how they have developed; how they have remained the same; the people who have left an impact; and the things that have led to changes or continuity.

To make things simple each of the things needed to be able to be represented in one image. Ideas could have included: a portrait of someone who is doing something, and that someone is the important ‘thing’ and their action had a significant impact during the last 70 years; a personal item that represents an event or idea; a specific piece of technology, rather than just a generic product; a place on a map; or just a ‘thing’.

What would you choose? Would you choose the big issues or the small ones that seem unimportant but have had a big impact? How important have the changes in technology been? 70 years ago a computer took up a whole room, now most of have at least one in our homes and a mobile version in our pockets.

When the Queen was crowned 70 years ago she was the head of an Empire, that Empire was already in decline but has been now replaced by a range of independent nations and a Commonwealth. What differences has that made and how might those changes still be having an impact today?

Would you nominate the laptop computer or the mobile phone? Is it an image of the Maze Prison or a map of Berlin that you would include on your list as objects that tell the story of the last 70 years?



From January to May the suggestions arrived via email into the HA office. We have collated them and the suggestions have gone to an expert Historian Panel who are deliberating over the summer ready to announce the findings in the autumn. Here is a preview of some of the things that were suggested.

From one of our members we got something that spanned the whole 70 years:

As someone who is now in his seventies, and whose lifespan encompasses the whole of Elizabeth II’s reign, the defining object would be a television, one from 1953. One of my earliest memories is watching the Queen’s Coronation on a small, fuzzy television screen in a neighbour’s house – we didn’t own one until much later. If an earlier generation’s contact with their monarch was via newsreel in cinema and radio broadcasts, now the Queen could

be seen and heard in their own home on a regular basis.

The experience of the Queen’s long reign has been almost exclusively through the television – televisions that have changed out of all recognition from those of the early 1950s to the present day. Now we have large colour screens in our living rooms and television pictures can be delivered to handheld devices we carry about with us all the time.

For most of us, the events of the last 70 years have been experienced through our television screens and the Royal Family’s own lives have been lived out through the lens of a television camera. Many public engagements that the Queen undertakes are experienced directly by only a few hundred people, but will be seen by millions of people across the world on their television screens.

Peter Hounsell, Chair of Ealing Branch and Trustee of the HA.

Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford celebrate winning Gold on 'Super Saturday' 4 August 2012



From our schools and younger members there was a wide range of ideas.

A few schools choose the 2012 Olympics, The Green School's sixth formers Goldie Marfo and Alyssa O'Mahony argued it was symbolic because:

The first Olympics that had been held in Great Britain since 1948 was a celebration of the capital, London, and of many incredible sporting moments. This included 'Super Saturday' which took place on 4 August where three British golds were won in Athletics all in one evening. Jessica Ennis Hill capped off a historic performance by finishing first in the final event of the Heptathlon which gave her the gold along with a new British record. Greg Rutherford snatched the gold in the Men's long jump and Mo Farah did the same in the Men's 10,000m. Like its motto, to inspire a generation, it seems to have accomplished that feat as many athletes in the following years achieved lots due to being inspired by watching these Olympics which allows us to see how it tells the story of the last 70 years, many events, including this, play a part in inspiring the next great athletes not just in sport, but life in general. These Olympics brought economic growth which exceeded pre-Games projections three-fold, almost 40% growth in local employment and over GBP 400m investment into the area which allows to see how it tells us the story of the last 70 years and plays a part in society still today and how communities have been influenced by these changes. Therefore, the Olympics held in 2012 can clearly be seen to have had a lasting impact not just within London but around the globe

On the other hand the History Club in Year 5 at Brooklands Farm School in Milton Keynes chose things that had happened in their lifetime and so they started with the year they were born, 2012, and the London Olympics. Their choice was an image advertising the event and said:

This represents the biggest event in the year that we were born. It shows that the country can come together to celebrate shared achievements and it represents the country's enthusiasm for sport. It represents the year of our births and was a grand international event. We got 65 medals in total. 29 gold medals, 17 silver medals and 19 bronze medals. This is special to us as one of the Gold Medal winners comes from Milton Keynes itself. He went to school in Milton Keynes just

like we did and there is a huge statue celebrating his achievements less than a mile from our school.

It is a reminder that we can all be champions and aspire to do great things.

The History Club also made a rather poignant suggestion of:

We have chosen this picture to represent the current affairs that are affecting our lives at the moment. It is incredibly sad that during what is a year of celebration for the UK (as we celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee), we are reminded of the fragility of life and how one dictator's terrifying choices can have such devastating effects on the world as a community.

This image also represents the community spirit and the caring nature of the British public. At school we had a fundraising day where we collected funds and donations to send to Ukraine and we wore yellow and blue to show our support. The fact that our community has come together in such a way to support people from so far away makes us feel proud of the place that we live in.

The History club of Bacon's College in London made a number of suggestions including a couple of music related ones:

The 'thing' will be a replica of the Banksy bullet proof vest Stormzy wore whilst performing at Glastonbury in 2019. Stormzy made history as the first Black solo British artist to headline Glastonbury, the largest music festival in the United Kingdom. Cited as the 'Godfather of Grime', Stormzy experienced an astounding rise to fame after the release of 'Shut Up' in 2015 and has been credited with pushing Grime into the mainstream. Not only did Stormzy make history by being the first black solo British headliner at Glastonbury, but the performance also contained within it a political commentary, which was to shape popular political discourse. By wearing a stab-proof vest designed by Banksy,



Stormzy headlines the Pyramid stage at Glastonbury Festival, June 2019

called the 'banner of a divided and frightened nation', and playing a speech by the Labour MP David Lammy on the disproportionate number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system, Stormzy made a bold statement on knife crime and the systems around it in the United Kingdom. By using his Glastonbury headline slot to expose and generate awareness of the injustice of Black young adults being criminalised in a disproportionate criminal system, Stormzy was calling for real change for communities in London which have been plagued by knife crime.

The 'thing' will be a 1969 Vinyl of the Beatles *Abbey Road* album, Music has played a big part in our lives, particularly over the past 70 years. This



includes new artists, groups and genres releasing new music that makes us feel all sorts of emotions and raise awareness of important political events. One of the most influential bands of all time, the Beatles, revolutionised music and was a key part of the 1960s counter-culture amongst young Britons, especially when they released *Abbey Road* in 1969, and fans went ballistic. Due to the extreme outburst of crazed fans, a new word was named after the band: 'Beatlemania'. It became a world-wide term and was even used when pop band One Direction was at their highest point. This highlights the Beatles' significance and the impact of their music.

The St John the Baptist School History Club in Woking, Surrey also gave a number of suggestions including the Black Lives Matter Movement as an indicator that we must all 'help towards making everyone's future happy and fair'. They also chose putting a man on the moon as 'that shows how much humanity has progressed and changed over time'.

Lukas in Year 5 (aged 9–10) Our Lady's Catholic Primary, Shrewsbury argued that the World Wide Web invention was the most important thing citing 'This changed the way people communicated to each other and it allows us to play with people even if they are in another country'. He also explained how it has helped parents to work and children to do homework, He finished by saying 'The best way to measure the impact of this amazing creation is to try to imagine life without it'.

Social and societal change was key for some people. Max from Northstowe Secondary College argued very convincingly that Legalising Same Sex Marriage in the UK was the thing that should be in the 70 years because:

It was a crime to be gay when Elizabeth II was proclaimed queen in February 1952. The Labouchere Amendment of 1885 was still being enforced meaning that men could be sentenced to life imprisonment for having a romantic relationship with other men. This is how Alan Turing, the mathematician that worked on deciphering the German Enigma code, was found guilty of sodomy in March 1952. Rather than imprisonment, he was forcibly injected with oestrogen to supposedly get rid of his homosexuality. His reputation and WWII service record were destroyed by newspaper journalists.

It was not until 1958 that open campaigning in Britain began for gay, lesbian and bisexual equal rights by the Homosexual Law Reform Society. The



One of the first same sex marriages in the UK at one minute past midnight, 29 March 2014

first Gay Pride march was held in London in 1972. But it was the global spread of the sexually transmitted disease AIDS during the 1980s, which began with the gay community, that forced LGBT campaigners to fight worldwide for equal rights.

Same sex civil marriages were only legalised in England, Wales and Scotland in 2014, and in Northern Ireland in 2020. This is an important statement that tells our society that same sex relationships are valued just the same as heterosexual ones. About 1 in 35 UK marriages each year are now same sex.

The students of Shavington Academy in Chester included events such as the Windrush generation's arrival, the Clean Air Act and the cloning of Dolly the sheep in their submissions.

While the students of Park Hall Junior Academy included the invention of the Mini, David Attenborough and his environmental work, mobile phones and gaming in their submissions.

Rose, Layla and Sophie of Eastwood Academy in Southend looked at the changes to women's fashion and how that represented women's freedom and independence.

For some schools the 70 things for 70 years idea was expanded to look at how different things had changed over the last 70 years. For example:

The children of Gorsemoor Primary School looked at how toys and childhood had changed. They explored different types of toys, from the styles to the materials.

Rainham Village Primary School and Nursery said: 'We are based in Rainham, Essex. Each year group had a decade to focus on starting from Year 6 with 1952–62 and so on up to present day. Queen, fashion, communication,



Our Lady Catholic Primary, Warrington



technology, animation, inflation music, transport and toys.

Some of the young people who reflected on the key events of the last 70 years linked their ideas directly to the activities of the Queen, for example Lowerplace Primary School, Rochdale, Manchester sent in entries about the amount of charities that benefit from her patronage, but they also thought that people of different communities living together and being friends was something to celebrate about the last 70 years.

A number of entries touched on the recent events of Coronavirus, especially the role of the NHS. The NHS is slightly older than the queen's reign, but only just, so its activities seemed to coincide with the Jubilee for many.

Overall it was an interesting range of entries and we will update you later this year on what things can really sum up the last 70 years.



Paula Kitching