

## DID LORD BYRON REALLY HAVE A PET BEAR?

Among the many other eccentricities of the Romantic poet, Lord Byron kept a bear as a pet. He was a noted animal lover and so was annoyed when he became a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1805, only to be told that the college banned the keeping of pet dogs. Not to be outdone, Byron brought along a tame bear instead, arguing that bears weren't specifically mentioned in the college statutes so there were no legal grounds for complaint. Byron won the argument and the bear was allowed to stay in his room. JH

## Did Nero really 'fiddle while Rome burned'?

The short answer is 'no'. The fiddle, or violin, was not invented until the 16th century so Nero would have played a lyre or harp instead anyway. With regard to the charge that he occupied himself with trivial matters during the crisis, the jury is out.

The fire of AD 64, described as being "more terrible than any

other in terms of the violence of the flames", burned for nearly a week and devastated large areas of Rome. Of the city's 14 districts, three were completely destroyed whilst a further seven were badly damaged. Nero, who had been out of the city when the fire started, returned as soon as he heard the news. Taking shelter in his residence, some claim he was so

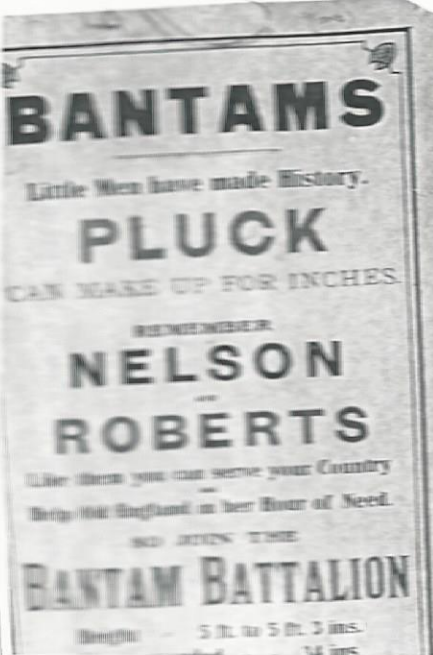
**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**FRIDGE ON A HOT, THATCH ROOF**  
 Iron Age roundhouses had no chimney hole, so smoke from the fire seeped through into the thatch. This made the roof the perfect place to smoke and preserve fish or meat. It was like having a fridge in the attic.

struck by the horror that he sang of the fall of Troy; an act that perhaps understandably did not endear him to later writers.

Nero initially helped with the relief effort but then, in what turned out to be a public relations catastrophe, cleared an area of around 80 hectares of the city centre in order to build a luxurious new home. MR



**OUT OF THE FRYING PAN**  
 Hundreds of thousands were made homeless during the blaze that lasted six days, and 70% of the buildings were destroyed



## WHAT WERE THE BANTAM BATTALIONS?

The minimum required height for British army recruits in 1914 was 5ft 3in, but a Member of Parliament, Arthur

Bigland (yes, really), got the idea of allowing shorter volunteers to recruit. He managed to persuade the War Office to authorise 'bantam battalions'.

The bantams - who had to be between 5ft and the standard 5ft 3in - proved well suited to tunnelling work, particularly

however, was a disadvantage in battle. The bantams had difficulty maintaining the flow of recruits and often had to 'dilute' themselves by taking men of regulation height. When conscription was introduced in 1916, the army quietly abandoned the bantam idea and

**TALL ORDER**