

April Fools' Day

April Fools' Day is an annual western celebration commemorated on April 1st by playing practical jokes and spreading hoaxes. The jokes and their victims are called "April fools". Jokers often expose their joke by shouting "April fool" at the victim. Some newspapers, magazines and websites report fake stories, which are usually explained the next day.

Possible Origins

1) In Geoffrey Chaucer's book "The Canterbury Tales" (1392), a vain cock called "Chauntecleer" is tricked by a fox on "*Syn March bigan thritty dayes and two*". Readers understood this to mean "32nd of March", or April 1st. However, it is not clear that Chaucer was making a reference to April 1st.

2) In 1508, the French poet called Eloy d'Amerval referred to a "*poisson d'avril*" ("Fish of April")

3) Some writers suggest that *April Fools' Day* originated in the Middle Ages, when the New Year was celebrated from March 25th to April 1st. Those who celebrated New Year's Day on January 1st made fun of those who celebrated it on other dates, by the invention of *April Fools' Day*.

3) In 1539, Flemish poet Eduard de Dene wrote of a nobleman who sent his servants on foolish errands on April 1st.

4) The first British reference to this date was in 1686, when John Aubrey referred to "Fooles holy day". On April 1st, 1698, several people were tricked into going to the Tower of London to "see the Lions washed".

5) Some historians believe that the origins of April Fools' Day started in the "Genesis" period, from the bible. In 1769, a London newspaper printed: "The mistake of Noah sending the dove out of the ark before the water had abated, on the first day of April, was a pointless errand. In memory of this event, on April 1st, people are sent on similar, ineffectual errands".

In the UK

In the UK, a joke is revealed by shouting "*April fool*" at the victim, who then becomes an "April fool". The jokes stop at midday, after which time it is no longer acceptable to play jokes.

In other countries

In Italy, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Switzerland and Canada, the tradition is known as "*April fish*". People try to attach a paper fish to the victim's back without them noticing. Many newspapers also report a fake story on "April Fish Day", which often refers to a fish, therefore giving a clue that it is a joke. In Holland, in 1996, during the building of a metro line, the city council created an "accident site" (see photo):



Some elaborate jokes have appeared on radio, TV, newspapers and websites. In one famous prank from 1957, the BBC broadcast a short film showing Swiss farmers picking freshly-grown spaghetti from spaghetti trees. The BBC later received hundreds of letters asking where to buy a spaghetti plant. The BBC declared that the film was a hoax on a news program the next day.

BBC: Swiss spaghetti harvest, 1957: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVo_wkxH9dU