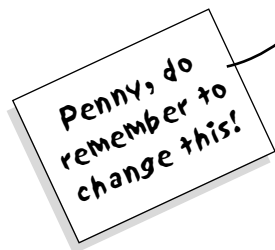


DO ANTS HAVE ARSEHOLES?

*... and 101 other bloody
ridiculous questions*

From the popular 'Corrections & Clarifications'
page of *Old Git* magazine

JON BUTLER *and* BRUNO VINCENT



sphere

With many thanks to Camilla Elworthy

SPHERE

First published in Great Britain in 2007 by Sphere

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-7515-4041-3

Papers used by Sphere are natural, recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests and certified in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Typeset in Transitional by M Rules
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc
Paper supplied by Hellefoss AS, Norway

Sphere
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
100 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DY

An Hachette Livre UK Company

www.littlebrown.co.uk

An Introduction by the Editor

The *Old Git* may be a venerable publication, an historical one in fact, but it has never been a *Young Git*. From the moment of its conception, some time between five and six in the evening – as its creator Phospot Smallblanes-Styveson-Bestface looked down over Gower Street and saw some sportive medical students juggling kidneys for money and thought to himself, The world's going to hell – our journal has been a home for more sensible and settled minds in a world where so often newness and excitement seem in danger of overwhelming common sense, decency and good, solid conservatism.

Of course since its first issue the journal has had some rocky times. I am not shy of cover stories past which have seemed (with the help of hindsight) imprudent. 'Indians Naturally Subservient, Study Shows' (Nov 1849), 'Mosley For P.M.! Black Shirt Fashion Special' (Aug 1936) and 'Ice Caps to Cover Earth by Year 2007' (Jan 1970) are among them. But our strong suit has been making a home for right-thinking writers with something to say rather than boat-rockers bent on personal glory.

Our 'Corrections & Clarifications' page [*Penny, I know you have a blind spot for the word 'clarifications' – do be sure not to replicate the misprint in the masthead when you come to type this up*] has been running since 1941 when the old git in charge, Sir Godfrey Phlegming, posed what he thought to be a rhetorical question about the efficacy of

contraceptives made from fine bone china. Such a flood of articulate and considered responses did his staff receive that he was persuaded to set up a questions and answers page and his secretary (who turned out to be a Nazi paratrooper posing as an aged, crippled washer-woman) elected to publish the three or four most ignorant, absurd or infuriating exchanges. This tradition has been upheld by all the secretaries to have followed in Fräulein Schencker's footsteps. Only three editors have succeeded Phlegming, each achieving an extraordinary old age in their tenure. I followed on from old Hal 'Haphazard' Hammondsley when he succumbed to a hang-gliding accident on a jaunt with Bill Deedes in 1991, aged 102, well may he rest. And at a frisky sixty-nine I look forward to several decades [*unless you cause me a relapse of the Chinese Trots, Penny. I hope you're not introducing new typos into my carefully chosen wrods*] of enjoyable editorship.

While we revere old-fashioned values, I hope we are not entirely ignorant of new trends and language – so, if you'll excuse me, I hope you 'love up' our first collection of readers' learned responses to the questions thrown up by everyday life and that it makes you 'go down' on our organ!

Tiddly spansks!

The Editor

A re there any undiscovered colours?

– question courtesy of Sir Michael Cummings, Biggin Hill

I have been furiously mixing paints ever since this question appeared in last month's issue, and am astonished and proud beyond measure to be able to announce that I have discovered what I believe to be an entirely new colour! By mixing blue paint and red paint, I have come up with a wonderfully rich, regal hybrid that is somehow warmer and more mellow than blue, and cooler and more elegant than red. I call it 'Simon', because my name is in fact Simon. I am enclosing a swatch of pure Simon for you to reproduce in your magazine – perhaps on the cover??!?

SIMON SAYERS, COUNTY DURHAM

[Ed note: We're not entirely sure, Simon, but we think you might have made purple. Thanks for trying, though.]

Not to be disrespectful, but this could very well serve as a kind of prototypical stupid question, much as Donald Rumsfeld's words about 'known knowns' and 'unknown unknowns' have become bywords for political bluster and obfuscation. The way the human eye reacts to the light it receives determines the colours we see. A point often made is that we can never be sure that while

we agree something is ‘brown’, we are seeing the same colour. In theory I might receive a blow to the head and wake up seeing completely different (or ‘new’) colours but never know the difference.

Synaesthesia is interesting in its implications for this – it results mostly from neurological trauma. In the USSR one Yuri Zherkov survived a plane crash near Katerinapol and afterwards saw colours in musical notes. Taken to the National Soviet Gallery, he was able to play many of the great paintings there in astonishing improvised arrangements on the piano. He had always been tone deaf, however, and his later attempts to paint the great Russian composers’ works were met with critical revulsion, official anger and banishment to a Gulag for anti-Soviet aesthetic tendencies, where he died of potato poisoning.

GREG MARESH, CUBBLING, ALASKA



What was the best thing before sliced bread?

Simone Taylor, London

Wooden legs, stout, second wives, the King James Bible, iron bridges, public executions, hot acorns at the theatre, the London Bridge and Queen Anne’s tits are among the things that have been historically referred to as ‘the best

thing since'. Many other verbatim references are to be found among letter-writers, diarists and journalists to 'the worst thing since': the Black Death, Welsh whores, that bastard Cromwell, France, the French, French anything, German anything (foreign anything, in fact), window tax, the Industrial Revolution and, in Pepys's famous words, 'the law against buggery'.

TERRY GRAITE, HOLYHEAD, WALES

We in the Best Thing Since Society have spent years campaigning for something to replace sliced bread in the 'best thing since' stakes. We are hopeful of recognition through avenues such as this column, so that people might start to call various things the 'best thing since . . .'

Here is a selection of our current alternatives: resealable coffee packets, the suck-nipple on bottled water, cashback, the 'recall email' facility on Microsoft Outlook, Snake II, multi-region DVD players, Orange Wednesdays and the *Daily Telegraph* Giant General Knowledge Crossword.

JEREMY SHRIMP, BEST THING SINCE SOCIETY, LAND'S END

As ousted chair of the Best Thing Since Society, reading Mr Shrimp's facile suggestions, I thought it might illuminate your readers to see the other things that were once considered for entry by that pathetic organisation: the Concorde, Gary Glitter, the widget, audio cassettes, Madonna getting into movies, leg warmers, spam, Tony Blair, the Northern Line, medium-wave radio, boxed

wine, modernism, postmodernism and the Cup Winners' Cup.

It will be apparent how transient the appeal of each of these things was. Yet sliced bread remains with us, as useful as ever.

JONATHAN RADIOHEAD, NEXT BEST THING SINCE SOCIETY,
BOULDER, COLORADO

This question was most interesting to me, as a former baker by trade. The best thing before sliced bread, was having ordinary, unsliced bread and a full set of f*cking fingers.

HARRY NOEL, WEST TITTING, SHROPS



When signmakers go on strike, how do they make their point?

Joost Kuyt, Amsterdam

As Mr Herring recounted in his fascinating letter (January issue), striking signmakers make their point precisely by not carrying signs (though as some commentators have identified, the whole affair consequently seems like nothing so much as twenty blokes in overalls, looking cross). Further to earlier answers, I remember well the

pitched battles between signmakers and militant coal miners in the summer of 1984. When members of the south Derbyshire colliery appeared over the hill, carrying home-made banners decrying Thatcher's government, a chilling cry of 'SCABS!' went up from the five striking signmakers, and a bloody skirmish ensued, while the police – grateful for the chance of a cup of tea – looked on.

ALBERT SHANKLY, LANGLEY MILL, NOTTS

I am very interested to read the letter of Monsieur Shankly about signmakers who make riots in England in the 1980s. Of course, in France the union of signmakers, FROTAGE (*Fédération Régionale des Ouvriers Textuels/Artisans en Grève*), we do things very differently, and with much more class. We do carry signs, but instead of the angry slogan, our signs they feature beautiful paintings of the signmakers themselves, in the style of M. René Magritte, over the legende: *Ceci n'est pas un fabricant des signes*. Though, I confess, we also block all of the roads into Paris and firebomb the houses of old womens.

JEAN-MARIE ORANAIS, PARIS

