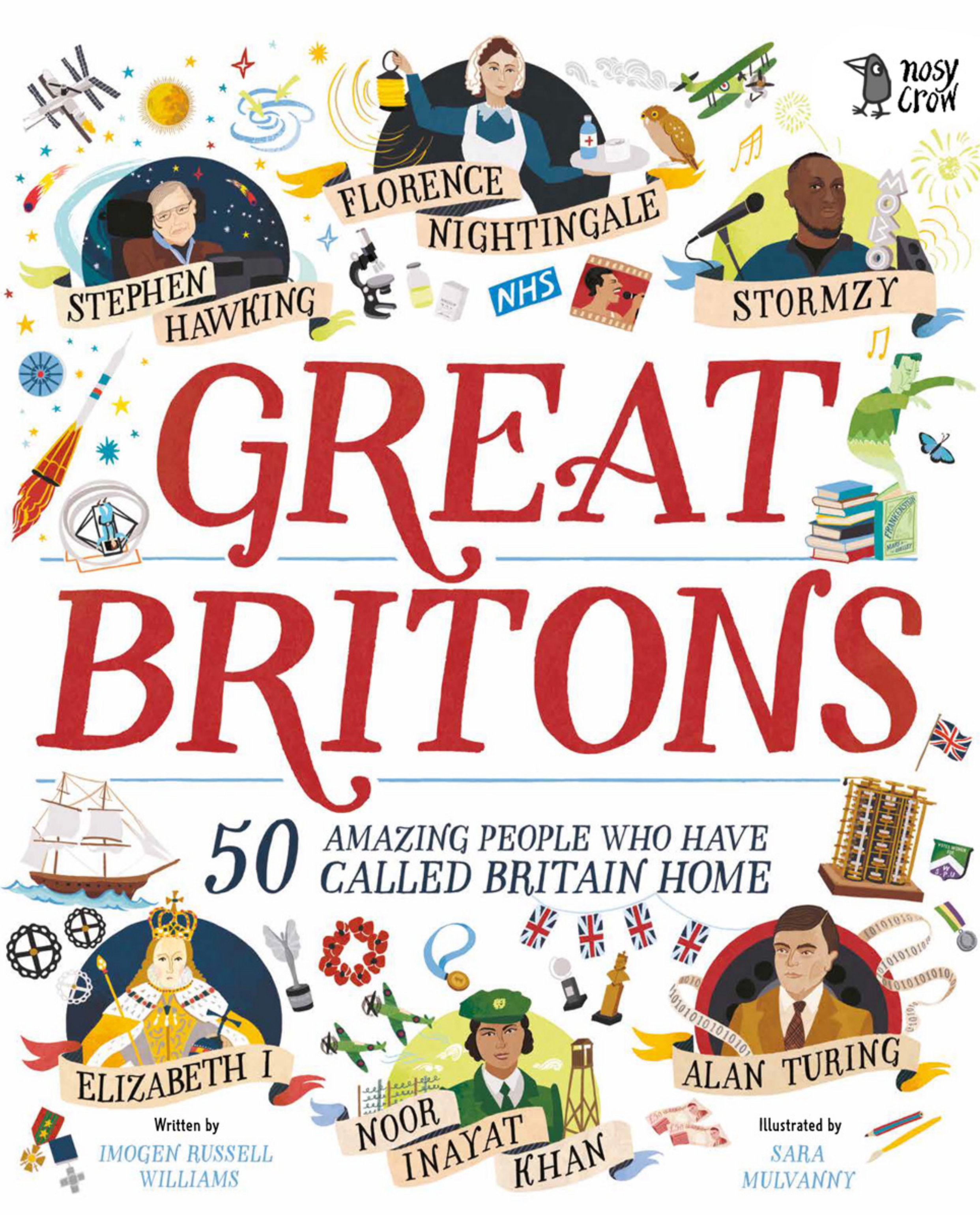

nosy crow
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
STEPHEN HAWKING
STORMZY
NHS
FRANKENSTEIN
GREAT BRITONS
50 AMAZING PEOPLE WHO HAVE CALLED BRITAIN HOME
ELIZABETH I
NOOR INAYAT KHAN
ALAN TURING
Written by
IMOGEN RUSSELL WILLIAMS
Illustrated by
SARA MULVANNY

For Pererin, who is Indian, Welsh, German, Scottish, English, and South African - and the greatest Briton of them all to me. IRW

For my mum, who always encouraged me to do what I love. Thanks for believing in me, and for your endless love and support. SM

First published 2021
by Nosy Crow Ltd
The Crow's Nest,
14 Baden Place, Crosby Row,
London SE1 1YW
www.nosycrow.com

ISBN 978 1 83994 015 6

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

Printed in China

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

135798642

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INTRODUCTION

Whether they were born in Great Britain or chose to make their homes here, thousands of extraordinary Britons have brightened Britain – and the world beyond it – and changed both for the better.



Writers like Mary Shelley, Lemn Sissay and Judith Kerr have made readers imagine incredible things, see the world differently, or hope that one day a tiger might come to tea.



Scientists like Alexander Fleming, Stephen Hawking and Tim Berners-Lee have made discoveries that cured illnesses, allowed us to understand the universe better, or connected people all around the world.



Activists like Emmeline Pankhurst and Malala Yousafzai have fought for women's rights, so that all women can vote in government elections or have access to education.



Musicians like Paul McCartney, Yehudi Menuhin and Stormzy have brought joy, entertainment and inspiration to millions of people with their catchy tunes, expressive melodies, or creative song lyrics.

And the work of Britons like Florence Nightingale – who pioneered modern nursing – and Aneurin Bevan – who founded the National Health Service – has ensured that everyone can be looked after when they become ill.

NHS

Great Britain's past is complicated, though, and its history – especially the history of the British Empire – hasn't always been great, just, or a source of pride. In the 16th century, England started to invade other countries, wanting to control them and use their wealth and resources. In the places they invaded, they stole land, crops and other valuable things, and often made the people there live according to beliefs that weren't their own. Sometimes, they even enslaved people who lived in these places, or helped others to enslave them. Some British people became very rich, while many people in these countries were treated cruelly and without respect, and became very poor.



The group of countries that Great Britain ruled over was called the British Empire, and the history of those countries is now tightly woven together with Britain's own. Most nations which were part of the Empire have now become independent again – but we are all still living with the impact of the past.



Some people who became part of the British Empire made their homes in Britain and helped to change things for the better. The Black anti-slavery campaigners Olaudah Equiano and Mary Prince settled in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. Both were formerly enslaved people who wrote and published their life stories to help people understand the horrors of the slave trade, which was officially abolished in Britain in 1833.



Many years later, in 1965, activist Paul Stephenson fought successfully to get the first law passed that said Britons of all skin colours must be treated equally. Today, the writer Malorie Blackman's gripping *Noughts and Crosses* books show readers all over the world how racism continues to affect people's lives, both in Britain and elsewhere.

Making this list of 50 Great Britons – and choosing who to include and who to leave out – was very hard, and involved some extremely tough decisions. Some people in history have achieved brilliant things, but have behaved in ways that did harm to others too. Some have created amazing works of art, but have also held harmful beliefs.

Roald Dahl, for example, who is here because of the many brilliant books he wrote for children, had prejudiced beliefs about Jewish people that are hurtful and wrong. Recently, his family acknowledged this difficult contradiction too, and wrote an apology for the harm these views caused.

Winston Churchill is considered one of Britain's greatest prime ministers, but he also held racist beliefs. He said and did some things that hurt people of colour, especially Indian people. As somebody who is half Indian myself, I feel that celebrating Winston Churchill's inspiring wartime work does not wipe out the memory of his other words and deeds.



When we look at these people now, and recognise their great talents and achievements, we also need to recognise their faults, and the ways in which their beliefs and actions were not acceptable, then or now. In this way, we can hope to keep changing things for the better.

And things do keep changing, all the time. This list isn't the same list that would have been made 50 – or maybe even 10 – years ago, and 50 years from now it will probably look different again.

Great Britain may be a small place, but it is rich in languages, cultures and brilliant people from all around the world – and there are many more than 50 Great Britons. The ones you can read about here are just a small selection of the inspiring people who have helped shape the country we know today – activists, authors, scientists, musicians, politicians, entrepreneurs and many more.

Who would you have on *your* list, and why?



During a time of constant upset and invasion, the Anglo-Saxon king Alfred the Great successfully defended his kingdom against the Vikings and made peace with them, and created laws to protect and help his people.

THOUGHTFUL BOY

When Alfred was born, in 849, England wasn't one big country but was split into several different kingdoms. Alfred's father ruled the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex. Alfred was born in the royal palace in Wantage, now in Oxfordshire. He was the sixth and youngest child of his parents, King Aethelwulf and Queen Osburh.

Although Alfred was a prince, he had four older brothers, so he probably didn't think he would ever rule himself. He later said he never wanted royal power – but he still ended up on the throne!

Alfred was a thoughtful boy who liked books, according to a Welsh monk called Asser who wrote his biography. His mother taught him to love poetry, both in the languages of English and Latin. When Alfred was 12, his mother showed her sons a poetry book with beautifully coloured pictures, promising it to whichever of them could learn all the poems in the book first. Alfred, though he was the youngest, won the competition – and the book!

Alfred also travelled to Rome with his father when he was a child, where he met the Pope. This exciting journey might have made him even more interested in Latin, which he enjoyed studying later in his life.



Alfred's three older brothers, Aethelbald, Aethelberht and Aethelred, all reigned as kings of Wessex before Alfred took the crown.



BATTLING THE VIKINGS

For many years, the Danes had been landing on the coast of England from Scandinavia. Danish Vikings (or explorers) carried out raids and tried to claim land as their own. Just as Alfred's third brother, Aethelred, took the throne in 865, they launched a big attack and took control of the kingdom of East Anglia. Alfred fought side by side with Aethelred to defend their kingdom of Wessex. In 867, Alfred married a woman called Ealhswith, but they didn't have much time to enjoy being husband and wife – the Vikings continued to attack!

In 870, Alfred and Aethelred fought nine battles against the Vikings. They were determined not to let the Danes take over Wessex, the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom that hadn't been invaded. When his brother died in 871, Alfred became king, and continued to hold the Danes back from winning power over the whole of England.

However, in 878, the Vikings, led by their king, Guthrum, came close to victory. They staged a surprise attack, and almost all Alfred's fighters surrendered – except Alfred himself! He lay low in a fort in Somerset and made raids on the Vikings while secretly building up another army.

With his new army, Alfred defeated the Vikings at the Battle of Edington. After this, he talked to Guthrum to find a way of making peace between the two sides. Guthrum signed a peace treaty with Alfred, agreeing to convert to Alfred's religion (Christianity) and change his name to Aethelstan. The agreement said that the Vikings would remain on the eastern side of Britain, in their own lands called the Danelaw.





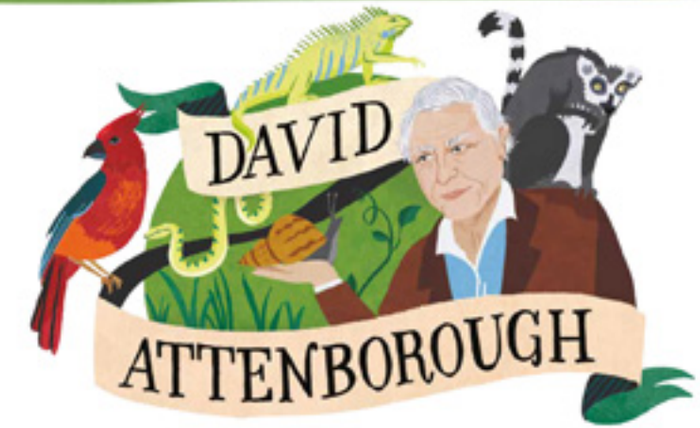
There's a famous story that when Alfred was on the run from the Vikings, he hid in a shepherd's hut. The shepherd's wife asked him to watch the little loaves of bread baking in the ashes of the fire. Distracted, Alfred let them burn – and the angry woman told him off! It may not be true, but it is a good story . . .

WISE AND BRILLIANT RULER

Now that Alfred didn't have to spend all his time fighting the Danes, he began to focus on some of the other responsibilities of being a ruler. He set up schools and rebuilt monasteries, eager to educate his people and preserve the kingdom's knowledge. He thought that learning to read the English language was especially important – and he personally translated many books from Latin to English! He also made laws to protect his people and to punish those who broke important promises.

But he didn't forget that his kingdom would continue to need defending. He built forts throughout the kingdom and he began to build up a strong navy to guard Wessex from the sea. He still had to fight off occasional attacks from other Danish forces. When he died at the age of 50, in 899, he left behind a kingdom in much better order than the one he had inherited – and he is always remembered as a wise and brilliant ruler, both in peacetime and in war.

Alfred is the only English king to have been called "the Great". His son, Edward, ruled Wessex after him – and his grandson, Aethelstan, was the first king ever to rule over the whole of England.



Have you ever watched a nature documentary? Perhaps it was one of David Attenborough's. Born in 1926, Sir David Attenborough is a famous television broadcaster and natural historian. He is the presenter of some of the most popular and powerful shows ever made about plant and animal life on Planet Earth.



YOUNG EXPLORER

Although he has spent nearly all his life working as a television broadcaster, the television was only invented the year after David was born, so he didn't watch TV as a child. His father was the head of University College Leicester, and David and his brothers, Richard and John, spent their childhoods running wild and exploring the university grounds. David loved science, collecting rocks and finding badger setts and birds' nests – he even made a museum at home to display his finds.

David wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty, catching newts to sell to the university for pocket money (at 3 pence a newt – about £2 today!). He was also keen to explore and take risks – when he was 13, he jumped on his bicycle and cycled all the way to the Lake District to spend three weeks there collecting fossils. His parents had no idea where he was!

A clever and hard-working student, David won a scholarship to study Natural Sciences at Cambridge University, and joined the British Broadcasting Corporation – or the BBC, for short – in 1952.



When David first started working in television, his boss thought his teeth were "too big" for him to be a presenter! He worked as a producer, camera operator, director and sound technician instead.



Still fascinated by nature and wildlife, David began to present programmes like *Animal Patterns*, teaching viewers about animal camouflage and behaviour. He preferred to film animals in their natural habitats, not in a TV studio. While presenting *Zoo Quest*, David travelled far and wide to find extraordinary creatures and describe them to his audience.

A WORLD IN COLOUR

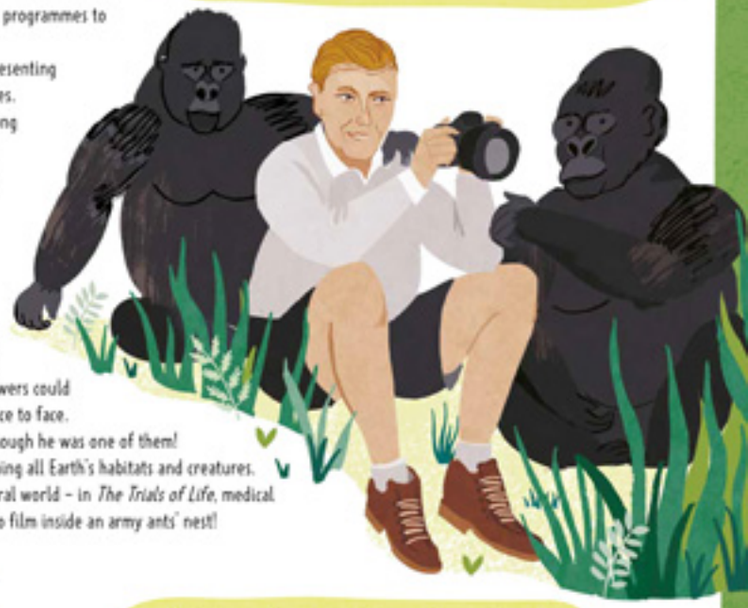
Early television programmes were broadcast in black and white. But in 1965, David was put in charge of the TV channel BBC Two, just before it began to broadcast in colour. Now that viewers could see the whole rainbow, what should be shown? He chose a range of exciting shows, from art programmes to crazy comedies, that made the channel very popular.

But although David enjoyed running BBC Two, he missed presenting and making programmes himself, especially wildlife programmes. So in 1972, he left the BBC and returned to making TV. For a long time, he had wanted to film a huge series, tracking life on our planet from its earliest beginnings to the present day. In 1979, *Life on Earth* was broadcast for the first time – and it was revolutionary.

As he looked at fossils, jellyfish and sharks, David's excitement gave his viewers a sense of getting right up close to secretive and amazing creatures. New ways of filming were used to show tiny details of animal life; camera operators would wait for hours to see a particular creature, or create fake habitats so they could film while animals slept. Viewers could watch amazing experiences, like David and a gorilla meeting face to face. The next day, the gorilla and her children groomed David as though he was one of them!

Many more award-winning documentaries followed, examining all Earth's habitats and creatures. David and his crew constantly found new ways to film the natural world – in *The Trials of Life*, medical equipment used to look inside the human body allowed them to film inside an army ants' nest!

There are more than 20 species of plants and animals named after David, including a Caribbean bat (Myotis attenboroughi) and a Madagascan stump-toed frog (Stumpffia davidattenboroughi)!



David wasn't the only performer in the family. His brother Richard would go on to become an Oscar-winning actor and director, starring in films like Jurassic Park.



SAVING THE PLANET

David is especially well known for his two recent documentaries about ocean life – the beautiful and moving *Blue Planet* and *Blue Planet II*. One episode of *Blue Planet II*, which showed a whale grieving for her baby calf killed by plastic, made viewers aware of how badly plastic pollution affects marine life. It had a huge impact, encouraging many people to start using metal straws or canvas bags to avoid filling the sea with more plastic rubbish.

Though some of his earlier programmes were more gentle or hopeful about the environment, David Attenborough is now determined to tell everyone who watches his work that we must act now to save our world. All his life, he has shown the development of life on Earth, its astonishing riches and the ways in which human activity has harmed and threatened it. Now he is using all his experience to tell us to fight back against climate change and extinction.





Born into poverty, with many struggles to overcome, Shirley Bassey would go on to become one of the world's most successful female singers, famous for singing James Bond themes – and for the sheer power of her voice!

SCRAPING BY

In the 1930s, life in the Tiger Bay docklands in Cardiff, Wales, could be tough. The docklands were full of sailors from all around the world, determined to enjoy themselves now they were back on dry land – sometimes in a very rowdy way. But Tiger Bay was also a place where people played all kinds of music, danced and had fun together.

In 1937, a baby girl was born there, the youngest of seven children, to Eliza, who had moved there from England, and Henry Bassey, a Nigerian seaman. Things were hard for the Bassey family. There were a lot of them and they didn't have much money. Back then, it was uncommon for white and Black people to marry, so they often faced racism and prejudice. The wider world was rumbling grimly towards the Second World War. And when Shirley was only one year old, her father was sent to prison, making it even harder for her mother to support Shirley and her sisters and brother. The family moved to another place, called Splott, not far away, and scraped by on Eliza's earnings.





ALWAYS SINGING

Shirley adored her mother, who was a good cook and very pretty – and who loved to dance. She didn't like the cheap meat the family had to eat, and being cold and wearing hand-me-down clothes, but she dreamed of better things – and she sang all the time, until her sisters told her to shut up!

When Shirley was a teenager, she left school and went to work in a factory to help pay the family's bills – though she got into trouble for singing on the job! At night, she also sang in pubs and clubs to earn some extra money. She had a lot of talent and appeared in a couple of touring shows.

As well as being good at singing, Shirley was a very sporty little girl – she was good at netball, baseball and cricket.

BECOMING A STAR

"I knew I was a singer the first time I heard applause."



Then things changed for Shirley. An agent called Michael Sullivan heard her sing and her powerful voice impressed him so much that he offered to represent her, sure that he could make her a star. He taught Shirley how to stand and move on stage, so that she could keep an audience spellbound. Then she was invited to star in a show at the Adelphi Theatre, London. After she sang on TV and impressed a record company, she was offered a recording contract – and the chance to record her own songs.

When Shirley was 19, she released her first single, "Burn My Candle", and a year later she had her first big hit with "Banana Boat Song", which reached number eight in the charts. After that, there was no stopping her. In 1959, she became the first Welsh person to have a Number One hit with "As I Love You" – followed by a second Number One three years later.



INTERNATIONAL FAME

In 1964, Shirley sang her first James Bond theme song, "Goldfinger". This made her an international star, and was followed by two more – "Diamonds Are Forever" (1971) and "Moonraker" (1979). She began to go on tours around the world. Audiences were amazed by the power of her voice and the glamour of her presence. She became known for sequinned gowns, fabulous jewellery and sheer style!





Shirley played the Glastonbury Festival in 2007, stealing the show in a glamorous pink dress and diamanté Wellington boots. She also sang at Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. What did she sing? "Diamonds Are Forever", of course!



Shirley went on to sell nearly 140 million records over the course of her career – and she is the only person ever to have recorded more than one James Bond theme. (She would still like to record another if she got the chance!) In 1999, she was made a Dame by Queen Elizabeth II, and in 2019, she was honoured by her hometown, Cardiff, and given an award called the 'Freedom of the City'.



ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

The brilliant Scotsman Alexander Graham Bell combined a lifelong interest in speech and communication with his love of science and inventing to give the world an amazing gift: the telephone.

INSPIRED TO LEARN

Alexander Bell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1847. (He chose to add Graham as his own middle name when he was 10!) He was the second son of Eliza Bell, who was deaf and used sign language, and Professor Alexander Melville Bell, a phonetician who studied how humans use sounds and other ways to talk to each other. He also taught elocution, which is the skill of speaking clearly. Because of his father's work, and his mother's deafness, Alexander was interested in speech and communication from very early on.

Until he was 11, Alexander was taught at home by his parents. Eliza was an especially inspiring teacher, encouraging him to work hard to reach his dreams – she was a talented musician herself, despite her hearing loss. After that, he was sent to school, but his marks were very bad! He was only interested in science, and often skipped lessons that he didn't like.



When Alexander was 15, he moved to London, where his grandfather, also an elocution teacher, made him feel ashamed of how little he knew. He inspired Alexander to learn more, especially about speech and how humans and animals make sounds to communicate.

Alexander went back to school in Scotland a year later. Here, he learned some Greek and Latin – and, like his father and grandfather, began to teach elocution himself. But he was still interested in science, and he liked to experiment and make his own inventions. At the age of 16, he and his brother Melville built a robot together.



Formal learning might not have suited Alexander, but his cleverness was clear. When he was 12, playing with a friend at a flour mill, he invented a machine to take the husks off the grains of wheat. This machine was used at the mill for several years!

SETTING UP SCHOOL

Sadly for the Bell family, both Alexander's brothers died of tuberculosis by the time he was 23. Alexander was such a hard worker that he often tired himself out, leaving him weak and at risk of illness. Desperately afraid that they would lose him too, Alexander's father moved the family to Canada, which he believed was a healthier place to live.

In 1871, Alexander moved to the USA and settled in Boston. Here, he opened a school devoted to helping deaf people learn to speak, building on his father's work. Alexander believed that deaf people should use speech rather than sign language so they could communicate with hearing people more easily – this made some deaf people angry, because he didn't recognise the value of different methods of communication.



While Alexander was living in Canada, he learned the language of the Mohawk people, and wrote it down – the first time the Mohawk language had been put on paper. For this, he was made an honorary chief.

AN INVENTIVE BRAIN

Alexander's interest in speech now mixed with his long-time love of inventing mechanical devices. He began to experiment and work towards transmitting the human voice over wires – making a 'vocal telegraph'. On 10th March 1876, after years of work and research with the skilled electrician Thomas Watson, Alexander made the first telephone call. The words he spoke were: "Mr Watson, come here – I want to see you."

In 1877, the Bell Telephone Company was set up. The same year, Alexander married one of his former students, Mabel Hubbard. Intelligent and business-like, Mabel managed their money – and even secretly booked Alexander's train ticket to make him go and demonstrate the telephone at a huge exhibition, which he didn't want to do. (He was grateful afterwards – the exhibition was a grand success!)

Alexander's inventive brain never stopped working. As well as the telephone, he later carried out research into flight, hydrofoils, metal detectors and even predicted global warming. He actually felt that his "photophone" – a device which carried sounds on a beam of light – was his life's greatest invention.

By the time Alexander died, in 1922, he had travelled a long way from his Scottish birthplace, taught many deaf people – including the famous author Helen Keller – and helped to connect millions of people, across America and around the world. As a mark of respect, during his funeral, every telephone in North America was silenced.

"In scientific researches, there are no unsuccessful experiments; every experiment contains a lesson."



