

Bram Stoker (1847-1912)

Abraham, or Bram, Stoker is most famous for writing the Gothic horror novel Dracula. But did you know that he also wrote romance novels? Or that he was bedridden as a child?

Born in Dublin, Stoker was too sick to leave his house until the age of seven. During this time, he was told lots of Celtic stories, including tales of malevolent fairies who sometimes drank blood!

These myths, along with other European folklore, inspired the story of Dracula. But Stoker drew upon other influences too. After getting married, he moved to London to work for Henry Irving - a well-known stage actor who liked to dramatically sweep his cloak. Count Dracula developed some similar mannerisms.

Stoker thought about calling his novel 'The Dead Undead' and naming the main character 'Count Wampyr'. But he later settled on Dracula for both, which means 'devil' in Romanian. Today, the devilish Dracula features in more than 200 films.

Anne Bonny (Circa 1698)

Anne Cormac, aka Anne Bonny, was a notoriously ruthless pirate who pillaged merchant ships in the Caribbean.

Born in county Cork, she was the illegitimate daughter of a lawyer and his maid. Her father brought both Anne and her mother to South Carolina to start a new life.

Later on, Anne married a seaman named James Bonny and sailed with him to the Bahamas. Here, he made money by telling tales on pirates. But Anne preferred to join them and deserted Bonny for a colourful pirate called Calico Jack.

Sailors believed a woman's presence on-board brought bad luck. But Bonny didn't hide her identity. Only during attacks did she dress like a man, donning a loose tunic, trousers and a cap. She was also equipped with a sword, pistols and sometimes a machete.

The British Navy captured their ship when most of the crew was drunk. But Anne and another female pirate, Mary Read, were its fiercest defenders. The whole crew was executed but, being pregnant, Anne and Mary both escaped it.

What happened next is disputed. However, many believe Anne returned to South Carolina and lived a long life. Today, her tale is a favourite among children who experience the EPIC exhibition.

Sir Charles Parsons (1854-1931)

Charles Parsons was the son of the peer of Offaly, the Earl of Rosse, who was a famous astronomer and builder of the "Leviathan", which was at that time, the largest telescope in the world. It can still be visited at their family home at Birr Castle.

Charles invented the steam turbine. It was highly efficient and could be harnessed directly to generate electricity. As a result of his invention, widespread and cheap electricity became possible and ushered in the modern electric world.

He also designed a turbine-powered yacht, the Turbina which was exhibited at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and was at the time the fastest ship in the Royal Navy. Parson's turbine engines would also be used to power the famous HMS Dreadnought, the first modern battleship.

An engineering company he established in Newcastle still exists today nearly 90 years after his death and is now a subsidiary of Siemens, the German conglomerate. Parsons was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in the United Kingdom and knighted for his contributions to science.

Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell (1943-present)

As an astrophysicist, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, is best known for her discovery of the first radio pulsars while still a student.

Born in Belfast, Bell's father was an architect for the Armagh Observatory. The time she spent there as a child ignited her interest in astronomy. The observatory's staff encouraged her interest too and she went on to study physics.

In 1969, while at the University of Cambridge, Bell helped to construct an 81.5 megahertz radio telescope. It covered enough land to fit 57 tennis courts and looked like a field of wire fencing!

She was the first person to run the telescope, which churned out miles of paper readings every day. She quickly noticed some strange squiggles...

Even her thesis supervisor didn't know what they were. Initially, he thought they were artificial signals and labelled them 'LGM-1' - which stood for 'Little Green Men'. But as it turned out they came from rapidly-rotating, city-sized collapsed stars.

The discovery led to many other scientific developments and even allowed astronomers to make a map to direct aliens toward Earth.

Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922)

Born in Kildare and educated in London, Ernest Shackleton developed a passion for adventure by reading books as a child. At just 16, he became a ship's apprentice and quickly rose through the ranks.

Shackleton aspired to be an explorer, but Europeans had already visited most of the world. So he wanted to be the first person to reach the South Pole.

In 1902, aged 27, Shackleton was just 400 miles from his goal. But his crew and sled dogs fell ill, so he had to turn back. On another trip, he was only 97 miles away. But once again, he was forced to retreat because of a food shortage. Shortly afterward, another explorer got there first.

Even then, Shackleton didn't give up and decided to cross the Antarctic instead. With 69 dogs on-board and a 1.3 metre bow for breaking ice, his ship - the Endurance - set out. But it got stuck!

To save his crew, Shackleton bravely embarked on a legendary trip, crossing rough seas, mountains and glaciers...