



# April fool?

Where did that tradition come from?

## *Tricking the fool*

Possibly the earliest known reference to the tradition is in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* of 1392, in a story set on the 32nd of March in which the vain cock Chauntecleer is tricked by a fox. In 1508, French poet Eloy d'Amerval referred to a poisson d'avril (April fool, literally "Fish of April"), The usual trick in France involves attempting to attach a paper fish to the victim's back without being noticed. Such fish feature prominently on many late 19th- to early 20th-century French April Fools' Day postcards.

## *Fool's errand*

In 1539, Flemish poet Eduard de Dene wrote of a nobleman who sent his servants on foolish errands on April 1. This sounds very like the Scottish tradition of 'Huntigowk Day', "gowk" being Scots for a cuckoo or a foolish person. The usual prank is to ask someone to deliver a sealed



message that supposedly requests help of some sort. In fact, the message reads "Dinna laugh, dinna smile. Hunt the gowk another mile." The recipient, upon reading it, will explain he can only help if he first contacts another person, and sends the victim to this next person with an identical message, with the same result.

## *Fool if you fall for it!*

On April 1, 1698, several people were tricked into getting tickets to go to the Tower of London to "see the Lions washed". This, and our current newspaper and broadcasters' tricks, make a fool of you if you fall for it. In France, a subtle reference to a fish is sometimes given in the article as a clue.

## *Who is the real fool?*

In the UK, trickery has to stop at noon—or else the trickster is the fool. But in the Bible, we are warned that 'The fool says in their heart, "There is no God"'. Our society is becoming more and more foolish as it writes off the claims of Christianity. I'm not after the last laugh, as ignoring God is no laughing matter.

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