

Five things you need to know today



Cycling talk – Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society – Edinburgh International Science Festival – Brahms Requiem – Canongate Youth Project

Graham Kitchener and [Pauline Symaniak](#) cycled across the US. Now the duo have made a film about it and are launching a series of talks to tell everyone else how it went! One of these talks will take place at the Wash House in Portobello on 26 April 2013. [You can book your tickets here](#) and here is a taster of the film they made on the way.



The Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society Spring Flower Show is on today at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. [See the winning bloom in our earlier article here.](#)

Edinburgh International Science Festival celebrates 25 years of introducing audiences of all ages to innovative and entertaining science this year, and since the first Festival in 1983 those audiences have participated in a number of public research projects and experiments.

From walking on water and over red hot coals, to the secrets of success and speed dating, the Science Festival has worked with scientists, psychologists and researchers to ask some of key questions of the world we live in.

Here are ten things that the Edinburgh International Science Festival claim they have taught us:

HUMANS CAN WALK ON WATER

In 2003 we proved that humans could walk on water. A Guinness World Record was set at the Royal Commonwealth Pool in Edinburgh as part of the Science Festival – the fastest person to walk 40m across water on two independent floating shoes. It took them 1 minute 10 seconds.

DAVID BECKHAM WAS BORN LUCKY

40,000 people participated in an online survey at the Edinburgh International Science Festival in 2004 when they were asked how lucky they perceived themselves to be. The survey, conducted by Professor Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire, found that people born during the summer months had a more positive outlook on life and a significantly higher belief in being lucky than those born during the winter months. Half of those surveyed who were born in May believed that they enjoyed good fortune, making it the luckiest month, but that dropped to 43 per cent among those who arrived in October. May babies include David Beckham, Johnny Wilkinson, Brian Lara and Jordan. The scientists think the difference in outlook could stem from the effect that daylight hours may have on dopamine, a brain signalling chemical, and early brain development of the foetus.

FEMALE INTUITION IS A MYTH

An internet test into the truthfulness of a person's face revealed in 2005 that if anything men are better than women

when it comes to spotting when something is wrong. Over 15,000 members of the public took part in the online experiment where they viewed 10 pairs of photographs showing smiling faces: one smile in each pair was genuine and the other was fake. Psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman, (University of Hertfordshire), wanted to test how easy it was to tell whether a person's smiling face was genuine or fake and whether some people were better than others at detecting a phoney. While women rated themselves considerably more intuitive than men, with 77 per cent of female participants classifying themselves as highly intuitive and just 58 per cent of men, when it came to making accurate judgements there was little difference, with men spotting 72 per cent of the genuine smiles and women detecting 71 per cent of them. What was even more intriguing was that men seemed to be better than women at detecting fake smiles in the opposite sex. Men correctly detected 76 per cent of fake female smiles whereas women detected just 67 per cent of men's fake smiles.

MEN HAVE LITERALLY SECONDS TO IMPRESS A WOMAN

In 2005, the Science Festival also asked 100 people to take part in 500 speed dates, and discovered that women are much quicker than men at making up their minds about a potential partner. Men have only seconds to impress a woman – and can stand or fall by the quality of their opening chat-up lines. Women were also found to be far more selective than men, and less willing to make do with second best. The study, devised by Professor Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire, revealed that in about one third of cases, participants reached decisions about potential partners in less than 30 seconds. This was true of 45% of women's decisions, but only 22% of men's.

JAMES AND ELIZABETH ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL

In 2008 we discovered that if you're called James or Elizabeth you are likely to be the most successful. The

experiment, conducted by psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire), involved over 6000 people indicating whether the most popular first names in the UK sounded successful, lucky, and attractive. Other results included Sophie and Ryan coming out as the most attractive while Lisa and Brian were seen as the least successful, and Ann and George as the most unattractive.

SCOTS ARE BIGGER SINNERS THAN THE ENGLISH

Scots admitted that they are bigger sinners than the English, and women are more saintly than men in 2010 when we investigated the seven deadly sins. During the online survey over 5,500 respondents from Scotland, the UK and as far afield as the USA and Australia, rated the degree to which they engaged in the so-called seven deadly sins – lust, greed, gluttony, pride, sloth, anger and envy. 90% of respondents admitted regularly committing at least one sin, with gluttony topping the list (54% of respondents over-indulged), lust coming in a close second (52%) and sloth third (44%). The research also revealed large regional differences, with 10% of English and just 4% of the Scottish respondents claiming sainthood. The survey was conducted by psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire).

VINTAGE OR VALUE? WE CAN'T TASTE THE DIFFERENCE

The Taste Test experiment conducted in 2011 by psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire), discovered that volunteers tasting inexpensive wines (less than £5 per bottle) and expensive wines (between £10 and £30 per bottle) were unable to taste the difference, correctly classifying the wine 50% of the time proving they could not distinguish between the two wines by taste alone.

VERTICAL STRIPES DO MAKE YOU LOOK TALLER

Val Waltham asked 500 visitors to the Edinburgh International Science Festival to judge whether vertical or horizontal stripes made models look taller. The results of her experiment, which used real people wearing real clothes, contradicted previous research conducted by her mentor Dr Peter Thompson from the University of York, which had shown that horizontal stripes make you look taller and thinner, due to a visual effect called the Helmholtz illusion. Val was awarded the BBC's Amateur Scientist of the Year Award in 2012.

HORMONES INFLUENCE YOUR DANCING STYLE

In 2012 Dr Peter Lovatt (University of Hertfordshire), in association with the Edinburgh International Science Festival, carried out the largest study of its kind into the link between dance and hormones. The Dance Booth was used to collect over 6,000 ratings of the dancing of men and women. From this large set of data Dr Lovatt found, for the first time, that people do communicate their hormonal and genetic make-up through the way they dance but that only people of approximately the same age as the dancers are sensitive to the signals. So, as we dance we are telling people about our hormonal and genetic make-up, but only those of approximately the same age will hear what our body is telling them.

SCOTS SUFFER FROM LOW SELF CONFIDENCE

An on-line psychology experiment conducted by Dr Raj Persaud in 2012, found the Scots, compared to the English, appear more likely to attribute success in life to chance, ruthlessness and family wealth. All of which suggest that Scots may be more pessimistic than the English who believe that their fate lies in their own hands and that they can actively control their own destiny. The finding has implications for the upcoming vote and debate over Scottish Independence as it could be that if the Scots really do suffer from lower self-confidence, they are unlikely to want

to take what some might consider the bold or risky step of separating from the UK. It would also suggest that the Nationalist movement needs to adopt a more psychological strategy if it wants to influence Scottish voters and boost Scottish self-confidence.

At the 2013 Edinburgh International Science Festival, which runs until Sunday 7 April 2013, audiences can discover whether they are **Fit for Orbit** with Dr Kevin Fong and Dr George Pantalos or whether they could man the first, one way, trip to Mars with Bas Lansdorp of the **Mars One** project. Dr Raj Persaud will be launching a public participation survey asking whether there is a psychological reason scientists are cast as villains in movies and Chris Lintott will be encouraging visitors to get involved in some exciting Citizen Science projects. Full details of the programme, and tickets for all events, can be found at www.sciencefestival.co.uk.

Brahms Requiem will be performed today at 1.30pm at St Andrew's and St George's West Church on George Street by the church's own choir. Tickets £8. [More details here.](#)

