

# Wouter & Michael's Solo Newsletter

## Monday 3 Jan 2022

### What's On

#### Coming Up

Tue 1 Feb Chinese New Year

### The News This Week

#### Of Squirrel Beer, Ant Gin and Poop Wine

Gin brewed with ants. Poop wine. Whale testicle beer flavored with the smoked dung of Icelandic sheep. This beverage collection sounds like a menu at the world's worst Happy Hour, but it's actually part of an exhibit held at the aptly named Disgusting Food Museum in Malmö, Sweden.

End of History beer is produced by the Scottish brewery BrewDog, and is served inside a dead squirrel.



The museum is already known for its peculiar culinary displays, such as maggoty cheese from Sardinia, Icelandic fermented shark flesh and Peruvian frog smoothies. For the three-month-long exhibit, "we found the strangest, most interesting and challenging alcohol types from the world," museum director Andreas Ahrens said. "Some of the exhibited alcohols showcase different types of homemade alcohols going back thousands of years, while others are experimental, made by local brewers," he said.



One highlight is a Scottish beer that is the strongest beer in the world, with a staggering 55% alcohol by volume, or ABV (on average, beer is usually about 4.5% ABV). But the high alcohol content isn't the weirdest aspect of this Scottish beer - the intoxicating brew is served inside a taxidermy squirrel.

"I have long been fascinated by why we humans force ourselves to overcome our dislike for 'acquired taste' alcohols" - drinks that can be intensely bitter, pungent or otherwise unpleasant, said Ahrens. "This exhibit is a deep dive into why we drink and how we started our strange relationship with spirits."

Disgust has long been considered a universal human emotion. But while the emotion may be universal, opinions vary widely about what qualifies as "disgusting," depending on customs, cultures and personal tastes, the museum website says. "What is delicious to one person can be revolting to another. Disgusting Food Museum invites visitors to explore the world of food and challenge their notions of what is and what isn't edible".

Anty Gin is flavored with juniper and nettle. And of course, ants.

Alcohol in the museum exhibit had to be considered drinkable somewhere in the world, even if some would be put off by an offensive taste, odour "or the background of how it's made," Ahrens said. For example, a rice wine called Ttongsul, once used as a medicinal remedy in South Korea, is brewed with fermented human feces. "The thought alone is enough to get most people to gag," Ahrens said. Unsurprisingly, this so-called poop wine "smells horribly bad during production," he added.

Whale testicle beer, a seasonal product produced by Brewery Steðji in Iceland,

incorporates testicles "that are cured according to an old, Icelandic tradition, lightly salted and then smoked," brewery co-owner Dagbjartur Arifusson told news in 2015. "We put a lot of effort into this and it's a long process," he said.

And Anty Gin - each bottle steeped with about 62 red wood ants (*Formica rufa*), is the world's first gin brewed with insects, according to manufacturer Cambridge Distillery. The ants lend "sharp citrus notes" to the beverage, the product website says.

Visitors at the Disgusting Food Museum in Malmö, Sweden examine a bottle of Korean poop wine



It's probably just as well that visitors can only look at the exhibit's alcoholic beverages, and not taste them. However, Ahrens did sample "as many as possible" while researching the drinks; he tasted "almost all of the rest" by the time the exhibit opened, Ahrens told Live Science.

In fact, four of the alcoholic beverages on display were manufactured by the museum: Korean feces wine; chicha, an ancient beer made from corn that is chewed into paste before fermenting; pruno, a prison wine made from fruit and brewed in a toilet; and a potent Ugandan moonshine that British colonizers dubbed "war gin." "The only one I can't bring myself to trying is the poo wine," Ahrens admitted. "It's just messing with my head."

## Why Do We Still Measure in Horsepower?



If you're buying a car and have no experience with power measurements or vehicle stats, you may be baffled by one of the vehicle's key capabilities: its horsepower.

Based on that term, you may assume that a horse can produce around 1 horsepower. Linguistically, it makes perfect sense. In reality, however, it's way off the mark. So, how much horsepower can one horse produce? And how did this term get started, anyway?

A horse and carriage in New York City. Horses are capable of producing around 15 horsepower.

The maximum output of a horse is actually much closer to 15 horsepower, according to the University of Calgary's Energy Education website. In fact, a more befitting name for the unit might be "humanpower," given that the average healthy person can produce just over 1 horsepower. So where did the term come from, then?

It was first coined in the late 1700s by James Watt, a Scottish engineer remembered for his iconic, and incredibly efficient, steam engines. Seeking a way to advertise the contraptions, he invented a unit of measurement that would effectively showcase the superiority of his steam engines compared with something people were familiar with: horses.

Watt determined - from personal observation rather than rigorous scientific study - that a working horse could turn a mill wheel 144 times each hour. Using this number, he estimated that horses were capable of pushing 32,572 pounds 1 foot per minute, or about 14,774.41 kilograms 1 meter per minute. For convenience, he rounded this up to 33,000 pounds foot-pounds of work per minute (14,968.55 kilograms), and the "horsepower" unit was born, according to Encyclopedia Britannica.

Watt didn't care much about the accuracy of the measurement, only that it highlighted the drastic productivity improvements buyers would experience if they purchased one of his steam engines. His machines were indeed far more powerful and reliable than horses, and as a result, very few people questioned - or cared about - the veracity of his calculations.

James Watt was a pioneering engineer who coined the term "horsepower."



Watt was, by all accounts, an engineering genius, and was so revered by his peers that, in recognition of his pioneering deeds and endeavors, the "watt" unit of power was ultimately named after him in 1882.

However, given that we now know a horse can exert far more than 1 horsepower, why do we still use a term Watt created as part of a marketing campaign?

"Because of the way language is always changing, there are more words that are estranged from their origins than people might realise," said Eric Lacey, a senior lecturer in English language at the University of Winchester in the United Kingdom. "Sometimes, words don't look right because they're using older meanings," said Lacey. "There is nothing tall or high about a 'highway' - this word comes from an older meaning of 'high' which was 'main,' and so a 'highway' is just a 'main road.' We have the same sort of thing in the phrase the 'high seas,' which just meant 'the main seas.'"



The 2014 Koenigsegg Agera RS/One is the most powerful car in the world, rated at 1,341hp:

This type of confusion plagues many of our words for measurements. "There are also a lot that just don't make sense anymore because, as with 'horsepower,' they were based on estimations that could be variable or misguided," Lacey said. "The measurement of an 'acre,' for example, was roughly the unit of land which could be plowed by one person with a single yoke of oxen in one day - roughly 4,426 square meters [47,641 square feet]. However, this could be higher or lower depending on the type of plow, the shape of the land and how demanding the overlord was."

A word's meaning can be corrupted or largely forgotten over time, but what makes a term stand the test of time? Why are some words consigned to the past while others, such as "horsepower," become ubiquitous? "This is the holy grail of linguistics! If we could accurately predict what words would be ingrained in people's minds, we'd be earning a fortune providing them to the advertisement industry," Lacey said. "The crucial thing to bear in mind here is that the words people use are guided by two things: individuals, and the way they interact.

Individuals may avoid words like slurs because they have problematic meanings or negative connotations, or may select words because they like their new meanings or how they sound, Lacey said. "Secondly, individuals may select certain words because of the bigger picture of their various interactions - they might participate in social trends, or respond to cultural events or be trying to emulate the vocabulary of somebody they aspire to be

like," Lacey said. On a group level, people may use words to signal their identities and values, to show they are up-to-date or to mock something.

"Against this backdrop, we can see how a [culturally significant] word like 'horsepower' survived," Lacey said. "If horses hadn't been the most obvious sources of industrial energy in the early 19th century, it's doubtful the term would have been as popular, but the fact that a single word could both convey the desired redundancy of the old and simultaneously usher in the new meant it ended up at the forefront of everybody's minds."

When asked if he would be supportive of rebranding "horsepower" to "humanpower," Lacey said, "As a linguist, I'd be very happy with that!" It would be a neat example of a word actually telling people what it did and would be more meaningful as a unit of measurement, he added.

## **SEA Matters**

### **SEA Monthly Meeting**

A meeting of the committee was held at Manir's Family Kitchen on Friday 7 January. In attendance, Don Cameron, Johannes Jonson, Frederik Cavadino and Michael Micklem.

It was decided that in view of Covid and other problems, the running of SEA this year 2022 will be very difficult, and 3 committee members have indicated that they intend to resign at the next AGM. With that in mind, 3 possible scenarios are envisaged.

1. Continue as before with 3 new committee members.
2. Freeze SEA for a year with no activities, until the following AGM in February 2023. Michael would stay on as caretaker during that period.
3. Close down and distribute the assets to charity.

This year's AGM to decide the fate of SEA will be held at Manir's Family Kitchen on Sunday 6th Feb 2022.

## **Rewards For Getting This Far**





**Quote:** "It is amazing how quickly the kids learn to drive a car, yet are unable to understand the lawn mower, snowblower and vacuum cleaner." – American businessman Ben Berger (1897-1988)

**Thought for the week:** Politicians are like bananas. They come in green, turn yellow, and there's not a straight one amongst them.

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