

Eccentrics

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An eccentric is a one person sub-culture. The English, usually quite conformist, have had a famous tolerance of eccentrics.

William Horace de Vere Cole (1881-1936) was an aristocrat who once had a bet¹ with a Member of Parliament to race him along the street. Very sportingly he gave the MP² a three metre start. What the poor victim did not realise is that Cole had slipped a gold watch into his pocket. When the MP started to run Cole shouted for the Police. They detained the MP, found the watch and arrested him for theft. Cole's eccentricity was playing jokes on authority figures.

Francis Henry Egerton, 8th Earl of Bridgewater (1756 -1829) was another fine British eccentric. Egerton was known for giving dinner parties for dogs, where the dogs were dressed in dinner jackets and waistcoats³, including miniature shoes. Each day Egerton wore a new pair of shoes and he counted the used shoes, so that he could measure the passing time. An animal lover, Egerton kept

partridges and pigeons with clipped wings in his garden, so he could shoot them despite failing eyesight.

John "Jack" Mytton was born 1796 to a family of Shropshire aristocrats. Many of his ancestors had been in parliament and John Mytton served in the Hussars⁴. From his father he inherited a family seat at Halston Hall near Shrewsbury, £60.000 and annual income of £10.000

Mytton would go hunting in any kind of weather. His usual winter gear was light jacket, thin shoes, linen trousers and silk⁵ stockings - but in the excitement of the chase he could strip down and continue the chase naked. Contemporary society considered his behaviour scandalous. He once arrived at a dinner party riding a bear and when he tried to make it go faster, the beast bit his leg.

Mytton was also a drinking man and could drink eight bottles of port wine a day with a helping of brandy. He managed to kill one of his horses by making it drink a bottle of port.

Once he lost his racetrack winnings⁶ - several thousand - at Doncaster races when the wind blew them away. His workmen and tenants regarded him as a generous man. Over fifteen years he managed to spend his inheritance and then fell into deep debt. In 1830 he fled⁷ to France to avoid his creditors. During his stay in France he tried to cure his hiccups by setting his shirt on fire. It worked.

There are no real eccentrics now. There are some millionaires who travel in balloons or drive amphibious vehicles but it is not very inspiring. Television and the gradually 'dumbing down'⁸ of British culture is not conducive to creative rebellion on an individual scale. We will all be wearing baseball caps and cheap jewellery soon.

Maybe, as on the defunct British Empire, the sun has set on the British eccentric.⁹ One more dodo in a so-so world.

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¹ Apuesta

² MP = Member of Parliament

³ Waistcoat =Chaleco

⁴ The Hussars area very famous British regiment

⁵ Silk is 'seda'

⁶ Money from betting on horses

⁷ From the verb 'To Flee' - To run away/escape

⁸ The gradual decline in intelligence.

⁹ This refers to the old saying "*The Sun never sets on the British Empire*" - An American professor commented on this arrogance with "*I know why the sun never sets on the British Empire: God wouldn't trust an Englishman in the dark.*"