

THE COLUMNS

by pupils; for pupils HSD's Newsletter: Issue 132



Well the October holidays are over. Hopefully everyone's spent their time well, be it in Iceland on the Geography trip, or visiting a variety of university open days for the form 6's. Or maybe you spent it online. However you wasted time over these two weeks, just remember that, in the words of John Lennon, time you enjoyed wasting was not wasted. Or whatever you tell yourself to justify ten hours on Minecraft. Admittedly the weather was quite variable, and it seems that there's going to be another storm again this week. I don't see why they even bother distinguishing between different ones any more. 'let's call this destructive torrent of rain and misery Bernard.' Seriously, who actually names storms and how on earth did they get the job!

Anyway

There's some absolutely fantastic articles in the paper this week, so read on.

Co Editor, Charlie Grewar

A Knotted Language

Lucy Smith

I have an odd obsession with languages, now that runs right from French and Latin through the High Valarian (from Game of Thrones) and Elvish. But by far the most...unorthodox language is that of the Incan empire.

The Incas were based in Peru from around 1430, until the Spanish Conquistadors invaded and conquered them in 1533. They had the largest empire in the Americas, and were a highly sophisticated society, building cities like Machu Picchu, to their love for hot chocolate.

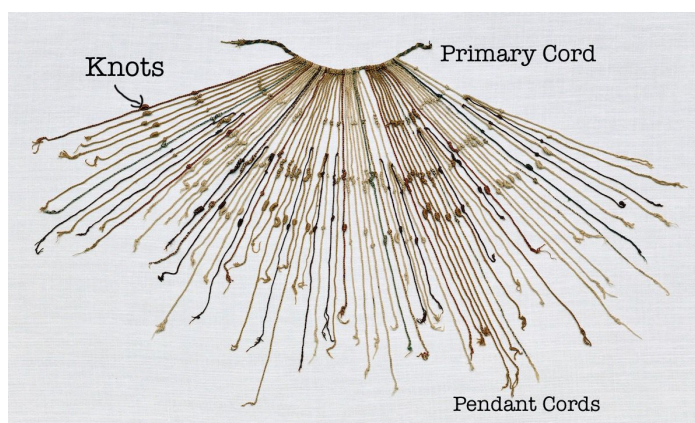
However, unlike most civilisations at the time, they did not have a written language. Instead they used a system of knots to keep records. A long 'primary' cord with many 'pendant' cords hanging off. Each of these pendant cords would have knots, representing numbers, much like an abacus. These knots could come in different sizes and positions, representing powers of ten, or negatives.

Most archaeologists agree that these were used for record keeping, like how much corn you have in your store, or whether you've paid your taxes. The usual mind numbing numerical side. But a more in depth study shows that there are more to this system than meets the eye.

See, not all khipus are simply full of knots, some have tokens like dolls, coins or cloth attached. Some even have no knots. This leads us to believe that there is a more symbolic or linguistic side to these specific ones. It could be that the tokens are part of a ritual, or record a ritual that took place. Perhaps the tokens show what is being recorded, or maybe the tokens even tell a story.



The Inca Empire, ca. 1530



A Khipu, ca. 1480

It's hard to unravel what lies in these khipus with the limited data we have, as the skill was practically eradicated by the conquistadors. However, a more scientific approach could be used. Under a microscope, the type of 'thread' used to make a cord can be identified. I use the word thread cautiously as there's one specific example where human hair was used to make a khipu. Most commonly, llama wool was used, but sometimes plant fibres or deer was used instead. Could these have an impact on the meaning? Or is it sheer convenience?

We can also run data analysis on where the khipus are found, and who with to try and work out what kind of people made these. In ancient Egypt, the only people who could really write were the scribes, was it the same with the khipus?

None of these questions really have an answer...yet. But at the very least I hope I've introduced you to a new language, and expanded your horizons a little.

Broughty Ferry Castle

Maisey Lafollette

Many of us will have seen or been to the Broughty Ferry castle, one of the tourist attractions of Broughty Ferry. However, it has now been closed for the winter to the public and we'll have to wait and see if it can be reopened due to a lack of funding from the council. I visited the castle on the last day and learned a little about the history of Broughty Ferry.

There are four main galleries in the castle, and in the first one we are given a brief history of the castle with a timeline around the room, there are also several artefacts from different periods of history. The castle goes as far back as 1454, this is when the first reference to it was made, (originally as a fortress) forty years before Christopher Columbus found the Americas. In the 1540s when Scotland was at war with England, a ditch was dug around it for defensive purposes, but the English captured the castle in 1547. The castle was originally a fort, on Broughty Castle Rock, the rock was formed almost 400 million years ago. By the end of the 1700s the castle was abandoned, but in 1846, the Edinburgh and Northern Railway Company built the harbour. Almost a decade later the War Office bought the castle to use it for defence from enemy naval fleets, during the Crimean War. It wasn't until 1969, that Broughty Ferry Castle became a museum.

As well as having a timeline, the gallery has many artefacts and photographs showing the life of Broughty Ferry residents throughout different eras. Anyone who's taken Higher history will know about the education act of 1872, but what you might not have known, is the castle has the school board's seal for letters. In the same gallery we also see a tawse, which was used to punish children. There were also several photographs of the New Years Dook, and advertisements from businesses like Goodfellows.

The second gallery had a collection of paintings which had many works from the James Guthrie Orchar Collection. The paintings showed beautiful scenes and showed many different techniques from different eras. The third gallery in the castle was the 'life on land gallery' this exhibit taught us about broughty ferry's wildlife history. There were several taxidermy birds of local wildlife, including seagulls, as well as geology displays showing how the landscape has changed throughout history.

My favourite exhibit was The Armoury because it showed the different historical events worldwide that Scotland was involved in and showed how different countries defended themselves. There was a pair of German gauntlets from 1500-1530, a Katar knife, which has Indian origins, and there were Zulu spears which they had to use to defend themselves from the British colonists. We also saw a collection of Highland weapons which had swords, knives and a shield. The swords showed how Highland weaponry evolved as they were from different centuries, showing how weaponry changes with time. There were also British military swords dating back to the 1700s. The Armoury also had guns from different countries and conflicts, which contrasted with the medieval swords. This gallery was my favourite as you learned about different countries as well as Broughty Ferry, and you caught a glimpse of their culture through their weaponry.



Broughty Ferry Castle

After going through the different exhibits you were able to go to the viewing area where you had the beautiful view of the Tay and the Ferry as well as other parts of the castle. The castle had something for everyone; whether it be war history, local history, natural history or art. Hopefully this historic castle will get a reprieve from the council and we can encourage tourists to visit our Bonnie castle.

ICELAND: THE LAND OF FIRE AND ICE

Shan Scott

Over the first week of the October holidays, a group of 40 of us were lucky enough to go to striking country of Iceland with the school. We spent five days there, and saw some incredible sights, so I thought I'd give a quick overview of the highlights, as well as the geography behind them.

Iceland is known as the land of fire and ice, and for good reason. Iceland sits on the boundary between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates, called the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. These plates are slowly moving apart at a rate of 2cm per year, creating a rift between them which can be seen all over Iceland. We were able to visit it in several locations, the most striking was in Thingvellir National Park. Here, while you walk between the sheer cliffs of the plate boundary on either side, you are also walking through the location where a thousand years ago, all the chieftains in Iceland gathered to form one of the first modern parliaments in the world, the Alþing. Twice a year they would gather here to discuss laws, fight legal battles and settle disagreements, even before a written language! This was all centred on the Lögberg, or Law rock, a specific outcrop in the rift where now a flag stands to mark its place.



Thingvellir National Park



Sólheimajökull Glacier

10% of the country is also covered year-round in glaciers. We visited Sólheimajökull, an outlet glacier of Mýrdalsjökull in the south of the country. Seeing a glacier in person gives you so much more appreciation as to how U-shaped valleys are formed, as you can see the incredible mass contained within them that pushes on the valley to carve out the shape.

As well as sitting on a plate boundary, Iceland is also situated above a geological hotspot. These are caused by magma plumes originating from the earth's core that cause the mantle under Iceland to be unusually hot. This phenomenon is also found in places such as Yellowstone in America, and is responsible for the geysers that shoot hot water into the air, as well as the natural hot springs found all over the country. The most famous geysers are probably in the aptly named Geysir Geothermal Area, where in the hour that we were there, we were able to see several geyser eruptions. It was incredible to see that water explode into the sky from seemingly nothing. The swimming in Iceland was excellent as well. Every evening that we were there, we went to either a local swimming pool, or on one day, we went to the Secret Lagoon, the oldest hot spring in Iceland.



Geysir in Geysir

Most of Iceland's swimming pools are outside, but they are all lovely and toasty. So you'd think that their heating bills must be tremendous! But energy isn't an issue in Iceland, because that hotspot allows geothermal energy to thrive. Later in the week, we were given a tour of one of these geothermal plants and learned about how they worked, and all in all, the concept is quite simple. When water comes up one of the boreholes in the geothermal plant, it is both steam and liquid, so these are first separated. Then, the water gets put through a heat exchanger where the heat gets transferred to clean water, which is then pumped at 80°C to nearby towns for heating houses, swimming pools, and hot water of course! The steam meanwhile goes through a turbine, which turns to generate electricity, after which the steam is condensed and along with the water dropped down another borehole. This is done so that the rock where they pull the water from does not dry up and run out of water. This powerplant alone generates enough electricity to power every home in Iceland, so the pure abundance of electricity has meant that energy intensive industries such as aluminium refinement have thrived in the country.

However, the most impressive things we saw on the whole trip were all of the waterfalls. They are formed when a layer of hard rock sits atop a softer rock, so the water erodes the softer rock much faster creating the waterfall. We visited three in total on the trip, Skógafoss, Seljalandsfoss, and Gullfoss, each of which had their own unique sheer awe inducing factor. At Skógafoss, you were able to go right up close to the water. You could feel the energy of the spray whipping up at your jacket, as you looked up at the flood of water arching over the cliff. Seljalandsfoss on the other hand had a lot less volume, but its power has carved out a massive undercut into the rock behind it. This meant that you were able to walk a full circle around the torrent, which was barreling down to the ground and impacting it like a bullet. And then there was Gullfoss, arguably the most beautiful waterfall in Iceland. It is hard to describe the incredible volume of water that rages over those rocks. It powers past you, smashing off rocks and boulders, before leaping off into the abyss with a rising mist of water clouding any view of its fate. The energy shakes a loud rumble that must have been a constant raging for centuries, and being able to experience that was amazing.



Skógafoss



Seljalandsfoss



Gullfoss

The final day was spent in Reykjavik, before we flew home early the next morning. Iceland is truly an incredible country, and I feel so privileged to have experienced a small part of it on this trip. Thanks to Miss Stewart, Mrs Craig, Mr Holden and Mr Finch for making it possible as well as Gunnlauger, the bus driver for his corrections to Miss Stewarts pronunciation.



Under the Floorboards | Case File 1

Conversion Therapy - Deep Dive

Al Forbes

Let me tell you a story. Once, when the world was younger and the skies were greyer, teenagers were taken out of their beds in the dead of night, and brought to tall buildings, looming over a dead lawn which shone in the moonlight. Screaming could be heard from inside the castle, rattling windows and furthermore killing off anything nearby. The floors were wet from tears, and the halls were blackened by the force of electricity sparking out when bodies were placed on Old Sparky. And posters were scattered around the campus: 'Conversion Therapy'. This is the story of how lives were destroyed, happiness snatched from young minds, and the story of some of the most distressing tragedies to ever strike our population. Welcome to my Deep-Dive – take a seat.

 *Note: This article explores real practices, political commentary, and historical events related to conversion therapy. All sources are cited and current as of publication.*

 *Warning: This article contains distressing and emotional themes that some readers may find upsetting. Reader discretion is advised. I have tried (and in my opinion succeeded) in making this more casual than saddening.*

In this article, my main focus will be on America (yet again, am I right, Donald T?). Rumours have spread that the man himself wants to bring back an act, so vile, so cruel, so deadly and destroying – that doing so could mean the end of thousands, and maybe even millions more to come. I'm not going to go into details on how Donald Trump is the most arrogant, disgusting, revolting (and I'm not going to include the other words I could describe him with because I think we all know that I'm going to get cancelled if I do) president I've seen so far. We all know his connections to Jeffrey Epstein (scum), hate towards queer people, and even more 'stuff' that I could write down but don't have the time to, is shocking and disgraceful to millions of different groups, sets of people, and communities. But today, I think that we should have a look at Conversion 'Therapy', and what might become of these 'rumours'.

So what is Conversion Therapy? Sometimes called 'Reparative Therapy' or 'Faith-Based Counselling' (which is like calling the US Judicial System 'Happy to Help Court' or 'Not-Corrupt Practices'), this act claims that it can 'change' or 'fix' a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It's been completely discredited and condemned upon worldwide – but some groups still push it.

The goal is to turn queer teens (but also queer people in general) straight or cisgender. It's usually advertised as counselling, prayer programs, retreats or other horse crap – to make it seem less... hmmm let me think of a word... FLUFFED UP. But, in reality, it's psychological manipulation, mixed in with religious guilt, shame, and fear. Side note: I'm not 'having a go' at religious groups, it's just the reason that these 'scientists' use.

🌟 Side note: if you get upset really easily, just skip past this and the next paragraph and know that what has been done is pure evil. Some of the methods include; getting teens to confess 'sinful desires' or recount sexual thoughts to shame and 'correct' them – something that is stupid because of the hormones teenagers have can sometimes drive people to think thoughts like that, queer or not (I can't confirm it because neither do I want to search it up or ask someone but I'm willing to bet real cash on it). Another 'tactic' is to show teens same-gender images whilst smelling disgusting smells or nausea triggers – I'm not able to say how that will change them because I can't put it into words – but I hope you can understand and hate why they did that to be equally as disgusted as I am. Other 'methods' these people might use on queer teens include emotional punishments (when they're repeatedly told they're disappointing a God or their family or just 'wasting their purpose'), role play scenarios (being told how to act 'more masculine' or 'feminine' which is horse crap because there is no such thing as that) and many more 'activities'.

🌟 But more extreme methods (in harsher cases) when those brilliant queer people don't give in (respect) include isolation: when they cut teens off from LGBTQ+ peers, online spaces, families etc until they 'change naturally' or something – which is shocking to believe that these people are so stupid and believe this will work. Another 'activity' is forced religious rituals such as exorcism (something like dancing around candles and singing opera at a low octave), fasting (also known as starving), or prolonged prayer sessions to try and 'purify' the person. But the most upsetting method that I could find and share with you today is electroshock or nausea therapy – not going to get into it but I feel the titles are a definition to themselves.

And just to make myself clear, from the numbers I've gotten, added up, I can say that it's like the entire population of a mid-sized Scottish city times five that have or (most likely) will have to go through Conversion Therapy. These numbers translate to people, lives, that will be destroyed.

But the harm is apparent and obvious. Studies link these methods that I have described in the last two paragraphs to lifelong trauma – depression, PTSD, self-harm, anxiety, eating disorders and [self-cancelling]. UCLA estimates nearly 700,000 LGBTQ+ Americans have endured it, half before adulthood. So these aren't rare cases, these affect literal THOUSANDS, maybe even MILLIONS. Not to mention, SIXTY PLUS countries have been said to have done this method. And I've gotten more figures, numbers, people.

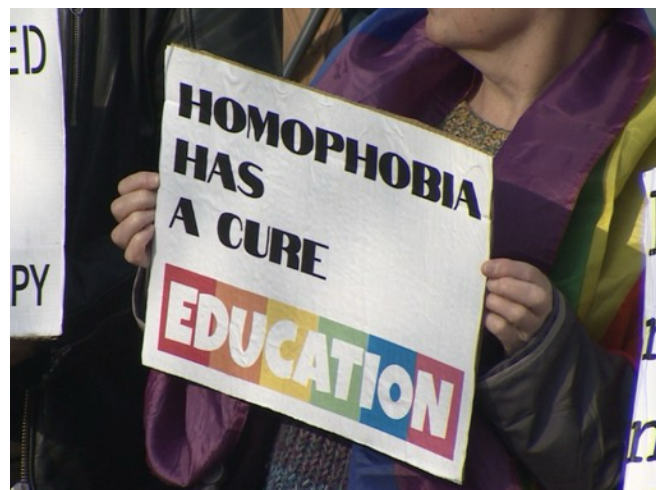
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The legal line has been set though, 23 states and D.C. now outlaw Conversion Therapy for minors, with a few more restricting it, yet millions of queer teens live where bans don't exist. FYI, there is no official ban of Conversion Therapy in the UK or Scotland (not including acts of physical harm included in Conversion Therapy which count as assault etc), so if I were to out myself now, I could be eligible for the 'sign up' sheet. So across the world where queer teens live, they could and are still in danger.

Now, Trump hasn't said 'Conversion Therapy' outright, but that's depending on your sources. We all know that he is against the LGBTQ+ community in general, cutting funds and adding laws against them. I'm not going to go into any more detail, but TL;DR: basically, depending on what you read, who it's by, maybe even how you read it, Conversion Therapy wouldn't shock me if it was legalised.

But, Trump's 'orbit' includes long-time defenders of conversion ideology. Former adviser Ken Blackwell compared queerness to criminal behaviour; Mike Pence once funnelled HIV funds into 'sexual behaviour change' groups; and Jenna Ellis, another top ally (of Trump, not the queer community), openly backed Conversion Therapy online. Even if Trump stays quiet, his circle isn't.



And if it is brought back, whether it's a therapist in Colorado who is suing to overturn her state's ban on Conversion Therapy, or Trump bringing it back under another name, the stakes would be high. Queer teens could lose protection against practices condemned as torture, mental health wouldn't be a thing for those teens affected, and this will end up hurting these minors all through their adult life.

Conversion Therapy was meant to disappear with the ghosts of the past. Instead, it's creeping back under new branding, as if it changes what it is. The question isn't about whether Trump is reviving this, but whether his policies are lighting the path for others to do it for him.

Now that the main body of my article is over, I would like to add a little paragraph. I've tried (and failed) to keep my views on this subject to a minimum. I've encountered and talked with immature people that think writing about crimes, conspiracies, sensitive topics etc will end up in my demise. And to those people, I hear you, I see you, picking your nose as you stare at your iPad or computer in panic. But the question isn't "should I 'protect' myself by not speaking out about it, raising awareness so on so forth," but it should be **"who am I protecting myself from?"** And the answer, no one. Except from the homophobes, haters, and people that are too scared to realise the world as it is, as it is becoming, and as it should be. I'm not just a queer supporter, I'm a supporter of truth. I want to shed light on hard topics, for everyone.

I hope this makes sense.

Hopefully I will be back again with another Deep Dive about another topic (and don't worry, editors, I will try my best to keep the next one shorter). Thank you for reading Under the Floorboards, and I hope to see you soon...

Karoline Leavitt

Jack Mitchell

This week we have seen a huge amount going on in the United States, from the ongoing government shutdown to demolition work in the White House East Wing to make space for Trump's new ballroom, but nothing has stuck in my head more than Karoline Leavitt's childish comments to a reporter.

Having been asked a question via a messaging app by HuffPost White House correspondent S.V. Dáte about the location of planned peace talks between Russia and Ukraine and who chose it, Leavitt inexplicably replied with 'your mom did'. This is official correspondence between a reporter and the Press Secretary of the United States of America. Let that sink in. Mr Dáte's question was a very serious one. He raised the point that in 1994 Ukraine signed a deal in Budapest with Russia saying the Ukrainians would get rid of their powerful nuclear arsenal in exchange for an agreement Russia would never invade. The fact Budapest was the planned location for peace talks between Ukraine and Russia 30 years later after Russia blatantly broke its promise seemed highly problematic, and so that is why the reporter asked who had chosen this contentious location to hold the talks. A very serious, unbiased question that seems valid in every way. To respond with 'your mom did' has left even Republicans shocked and angry.

Mr Dáte followed up with a message asking 'is this funny to you?', to which Leavitt replied with an insulting paragraph that called him a 'far left hack' whom nobody takes seriously. This behaviour is extremely unusual for such a high-profile figure in the White House, and what has been seen as a failing of her role as Press Secretary – to interact respectfully with members of the press – has led some to question her suitability to retain it. However, none of these opinions have been heard from the Trump camp, unsurprisingly.

What may seem as an amusing joke is anything but; it marks a shameful reduction in standards of the people who should be leading by positive example and not encouraging such behaviour. It is highly unlikely she will be reprimanded, let alone sacked like many of her predecessors likely would have been. No, Karoline will keep her job for many years, obfuscating and damaging public discourse as she goes.

Editors' note
That's All Folks!

Your Editors - Charlie, Emma, and Shan