

Dec. 6th

## Britannica

### Published

Dec. 6, 1768

The first part of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* was published in Edinburgh. It would eventually grow to three volumes, completed in 1771. It was the brainchild of Colin Macfarquhar and Andrew Bell, as a British counter-attack against the French *Encyclopédie* by Denis Diderot (which ran to 28 volumes). Amongst connoisseurs, the Britannica's 9th (1875–1889) and 11th editions (1911) are considered landmarks of scholarship and literary style.

On [Dec 14] 2005, the journal *Nature* published a study comparing the accuracy of the Britannica with Wikipedia [Jan 15], which found little difference between them (except maybe in price and convenience). In March 2012, the company announced that it was ceasing to print the encyclopedia (now in its 15th edition), to focus on an online version.

## First Audio Recording

Dec. 6, 1877

Thomas Edison [Feb 11] recorded a recitation of "Mary had a Little Lamb" onto a cylinder wrapped with tinfoil, employing a prototype hand-cranked phonograph. It had been built by John Kruesi, Edison's head machinist at the Menlo Park lab, over the previous six days according to Edison's exacting specifications.

It became the first recording of a human voice that could be played back. When Kruesi heard it later that day, he exclaimed "Gott in Himmel!" (Kruesi was Swiss, but a German-speaker).

Kruesi was involved in many of Edison's key inventions, including the quadruplex telegraph, the carbon microphone, and the incandescent light bulb.

Edison was granted a patent for the phonograph on Feb. 19, 1878 (US 200,521), but it wasn't until the late 1880's that an improved version was marketed to the public.

Sadly, the original recording was lost, but Edison reenacted the recording in 1927, and that version survives. The earliest existent recording is from June 22, 1878. Slightly more than a minute long, it includes a short cornet solo, a man reciting nursery rhymes, and some laughter. The audio was retrieved from a heavily corroded cylinder by 3D imaging in Oct. 2012. The oldest magnetic recording dates from 1900 [Nov 23].

## Geoffrey Everest Hinton

Born: Dec. 6, 1947;  
Wimbledon, London

Hinton is often called the father of deep learning, a red-hot topic in AI, due to a landmark paper from 2012 by Hinton and two of his students. They showed that specially designed multi-layer neural nets, trained using backpropagation, could handily beat state-of-the-art conventional image recognition systems.

Hinton dates his interest in science to when he was a 4-year-old, travelling on a bus with his mother. The bus had a seat that sloped backward, but when Hinton put a penny on the seat, instead of slipping toward the back, it slid toward the front, seemingly moving upward against gravity.

Hinton's great-great-grandfather was George Boole [Nov 2], and his great-grandfather, Charles Howard Hinton, was a mathematician and sci-fi author

who invented the tesseract [Nov 1].



Geoffrey Hinton (2013). Photo by Eviatar Bach. CC BY-SA 3.0.

## Craig Alexander Newmark

Born: Dec. 6, 1952;  
Morristown, New Jersey

Newmark founded Craigslist, a classified ads website with sections devoted to jobs, housing, items wanted/for sale, services, and more. However, adverts for "adult" services were discontinued on Sept. 4, 2010, following claims that they promoted prostitution. On March 22, 2018, its "Personals" section also disappeared after the passing of the "Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act" (SESTA).

Newmark had begun Craigslist in 1995 as an email distribution list for his friends, featuring local stores and events in the San Francisco Bay Area. The first two listings were for "Joe's Digital Diner" and the "Anon Salon", and the e-mail was posted to around ten people.

Craigslist became a web-based service in 1996, expanded into other categories, and branched out to other US cities in 2000; it now covers over 70 countries.

As of 2016, the company generated nearly \$700 million in yearly revenue but only had 50 employees.

## Young Sherlock Holmes

Dec. 6, 1985

Paramount Pictures released the action film "Young Sherlock Holmes", directed by Barry Levinson. It's notable for being the first full-length movie to feature a 3D computer-generated character, "the stained-glass man" - a knight composed of shards of stained-glass who attacks Sherlock with a sword.

The knight was only on-screen for some 30 seconds, but the sequence took 4-6 months to create. It was primarily the work of John Lasseter at Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) [Sept 12].

However, some people argue that the first CGI 'character' was the polyhedron character, "Bit," featured in Tron ([July 9] 1982)

---

## Video Toaster Released

Dec. 6, 1990

The NewTek "Video Toaster" was a combination of hardware and software for video editing on the Commodore Amiga 2000 [July 23].

It was designed by NewTek founder Tim Jenison, who had also produced the first video capture device for the Amiga, the DigiView. The prototype was built by Brad Carvey (brother of comedian Dana Carvey, who claimed that Brad was the inspiration for his Garth character in "Wayne's World"). Steve Kell wrote the software.

The Toaster was a low-cost alternative to professional systems costing ten or hundred times as much. The result was the growth of a cottage industry for video production, not unlike the Mac's desktop publishing scene from a few years before [March 1].

Perhaps the most important third-party software aimed at the Toaster was LightWave 3D,

developed by Allen Hastings and Stuart Ferguson. It could create animated, realistic looking 3D graphics, and was heavily utilized in sci-fi TV shows such as "Babylon 5" and "Star Trek: Voyager" [Sept 8].

The Toaster won an Emmy Award for Technical Achievement in 1993.

---

## QuickTime Piracy

Dec. 6, 1994

Prev: [Aug 24] Next: [Aug 6]

Apple released "QuickTime for the Mac" on [Dec 2] 1991, and outsourced the work of porting it to MS Windows to the San Francisco Canyon Company. Coincidentally perhaps, Intel also hired the San Francisco Canyon Company in 1993, and later the same year, Microsoft (with Intel's help) released "Video for Windows".

Apple became a tad upset when they discovered that code from "QuickTime for Windows" had mysteriously appeared in "Video for Windows", and sued San Francisco Canyon on this day. Early in 1995, Apple expanded the lawsuit to include Intel and Microsoft.

The [Aug 6] 1997 settlement was in Apple's favor, and came at just the right time, after 18 months of losses. It helped Apple stagger on until Steve Jobs' return [Sept 16].

---

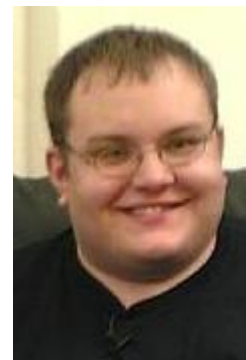
## First Viral Video

Dec. 6, 2004

Gary Brolsma uploaded his video, "Numa Numa Dance", to the website Newgrounds.com. It shows Brolsma lip-synching to the hit song "Dragostea Din Tei" by O-Zone, and displaying some idiosyncratic dance moves.

"Numa Numa" is now believed to be the Web's first viral video. After less than three months, it had been viewed two million times. In Nov. 2006, "The Viral Factory" estimated that the

video had been played over 700 million times.



Gary Brolsma (2006).  
Photo by Andrew Baron.  
CC BY-SA 2.0.

For more Internet memes, see [Jan 5], [April 21], [July 27], [Aug 00], [Nov 15].

---