

Sir John Lubbock

(Who gave us Bank Holidays, amongst other things)

John Lubbock was born in 1834, into a wealthy family. His father, also called John Lubbock, was a city banker, and had a 3000acre estate called High Elms, in the village of Downe in Kent, where Charles Darwin also lived.



From a very early age, John was fascinated by science, and when he was just seven, Charles Darwin and his family moved into Down House. Darwin nurtured young John's fascination and became his *mentor* as he grew up. He was always eager to learn and Darwin bought him a microscope, so that they could study plants and animals together.

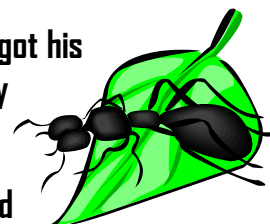
Sir John Lubbock, 30/4/1834 to 28/5/1913.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lubbock,_1st_Baron_Avebury

When he became old enough to go to university, his father would not let him go and made him work in the family's bank. But he refused to give up his studies, and studied archaeology in his spare time.

Lubbock bought Kingsgate Castle on the coast of Kent, and carried out animal experiments there. He thought that his puppy, Van, was as intelligent as a child, and so set to teaching him to read. He covered the dog's food bowl with a piece of card carrying the word 'Food'. To be fed, Van had to carry the cardboard to John. After a short time, the food bowl was taken away and a number of pieces of card were placed on the floor, carrying different words. Van had to pick the one that said 'Food' to be fed. He did it successfully. He then had to learn the words for 'water', 'bone' and 'tea', which, apparently, he liked. He later learned to bring a card with the word 'Out' if he wanted to go for a walk. But Van never learned to count.

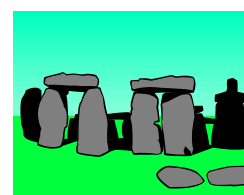
John also kept a hive of bees in his lounge, so that he could watch their behaviour. He connected the hive to a window, so that the bees could go in and out.

An ants' nest in a glass case was also in the room. In one experiment he got his ants drunk with drops of alcohol and noted that the sober ants would carry the drunken ants home!



John Lubbock also encouraged a love of animals in his own children and bought a pair of ferrets as pets for them. Unfortunately, they escaped from their sack on the train home, and the passengers were terrified until Lubbock could catch them again. He then locked them into his briefcase, but they ate all of his papers!

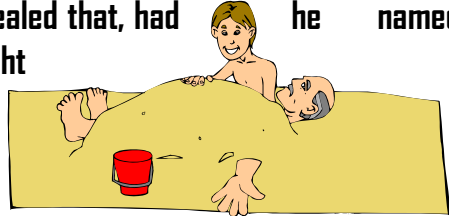
Another story concerns an incident when his briefcase was stolen. The thief managed to open it, only to discover a hive of bees inside! Lubbock had bought them to add to his hive.



His interest in archaeology saved Stonehenge from destruction! A

railway company had plans to run a train-line right past the ancient monument. John blocked the plans. He was also the man who gave us the words 'paleolithic' and 'neolithic'.

But it is probably for Bank Holidays that Lubbock is best known. He entered Parliament as an MP in 1870, and set about getting extra holidays for workers, and also shorter hours. He was once asked why he'd named them 'bank holidays' and revealed that, had he named them 'general holidays' or 'national holidays', people might ignore them. But if the banks closed, then no business could be done anyway, so firms would have to close and give their workers the day off. (Clever, eh?) So you have a lot to thank John Lubbock for!



1. Where did John Lubbock live?
2. Who became his friend and mentor?
3. What is a 'mentor'? Who do you think would be a good mentor for you?
4. When his father wouldn't let him go to university, did he give up studying? What do you think of that? What might that teach you?
5. What did he teach his dog to do? Can you think of a good experiment you could do to find out about animals? (*How about favourite foods for the birds during the winter? Or are insects attracted to certain colours?*)
6. What do you think your parents would say to you keeping bees and ants in the lounge?
7. How do you think the thief felt when he opened John's briefcase?
8. Why do we owe him a great historical debt? Do you think it is important that we protect our natural and historical landscape from development? Why/why not?
9. What do 'paleolithic' and 'neolithic' mean?
10. What 'gift' did he give to all of us?
11. Imagine the scene on the train when John's ferrets escaped. Write a paragraph as if you were there.
12. Design an experiment that you might be able to carry out either at home or at school.