

NAXOS
AudioBooks

NON-
FICTION

HISTORY



They Saw It Happen

Eyewitness Accounts
from Ancient Greece
to Hiroshima

Compiled by
Matthew Lewin

Introduced by
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Read by
Teresa Gallagher
Tom George
Steve Hodson
Kerry Shale

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1	Introduction	2:58
2	The Spartans at Thermopylae, 480 BC	7:40
3	– Next day the combat was renewed...	7:32
4	Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon, 49 BC	3:18
5	The Fire of Rome, 64 AD	3:57
6	Nero persecutes the Christians, 64 AD	2:06
7	The mass suicide of Zealots at Masada, 74 AD	6:24
8	– Now as Eleazar was proceeding...	4:40
9	The eruption of Vesuvius, 79 AD	6:06
10	The Crusaders liberate Jerusalem, 1099	6:09
11	The murder of Thomas Becket, 1170	5:11
12	The Black Death, 1348	10:11
13	The death of Magellan, 1521	4:47
14	The Pilgrim Fathers' first few days, 1620	4:45
15	Execution of Charles I, 1649	6:54
16	The Great Fire of London, 1666	5:50
17	The Siege of Londonderry, 1689	5:06
18	The Salem Witch Trials, 1692	6:05

19	Cock fighting, 1710	3:30
20	Executions, 1728	3:39
21	The Boston Tea Party, 1773	6:53
22	Slavery in the West Indies, 1774	2:31
23	Declaration of Independence, 1776	5:02
24	The first aerial voyage, 1784	4:15
25	Marie Antoinette at the opera, 1792	2:09
26	Execution of Louis XVI, 1793	5:52
27	Fanny Burney glimpses Napoleon, 1802	3:40
28	The death of Nelson, 1805	7:31
29	Taken by the press gang, 1811	4:38
30	A slave owner's view, 1817	1:55
31	One of the first railway passengers, 1830	3:44
32	The exploitation of children, 1831	3:10
33	The coronation of Queen Victoria, 1838	4:26
34	London – prostitutes, 1839	3:56
35	A sale of slaves, 1846	2:42
36	Dickens criticises public executions, 1849	4:09

37	The Charge of the Light Brigade, 1854	8:11
38	The American Civil War, 1862	7:57
39	The meeting of Stanley and Livingstone, 1871	2:14
40	The Battle of Little Bighorn, 1876	3:27
41	A puff of opium in Tiger Bay, 1883	6:16
42	White slavery in London, 1888	7:18
43	Saturday 30 June 1888	4:10
44	Paul Gaugin chooses a bride, 1892	7:05
45	The Battle of Magersfontein, 1899	2:20
46	The first flight, 1903	7:47
47	The San Francisco earthquake, 1906	4:10
48	The San Francisco earthquake (cont.)	3:04
49	The first flight across the English Channel, 1909	3:23
50	The arrest of Dr Crippen, 1910	5:49
51	The sinking of the Titanic, 1912	2:48
52	Gas attack – World War I, 1916	6:41
53	Realism in films, 1920	4:41

54	Opening Tutankhamun's tomb, 1922	6:14
55	Lindbergh flies the Atlantic, 1927	4:56
56	The Battle of Britain, 1940	6:12
57	The London Blitz, 1940	5:08
58	The testimony of Rudolf Hess, 1946	7:42
59	The attack on Pearl Harbour, 1941	6:49
60	A Japanese view of the attack on Pearl Harbour, 1941	6:25
60	Hiroshima, 1945	9:31

Total time: 5:14:15

They Saw It Happen

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What is the point of history? To some it is a source of inspiration for the present, for others a meaningless jumble of kings and dates. Wherever one stands, however, there is no escaping it; it is happening around us every day, and we are all participants, willing or not.

History can never be an exact science. To most of us it is a received opinion that few outside the professional historian ever question. These 'legends' and often apocryphal tales handed down through the centuries are hard to defeat: the Cavaliers and Charles I were good; the Roundheads and Oliver Cromwell bad. Queen Victoria was 'not amused'; Charles II was a 'merry monarch'. Drake played a game of bowls before defeating the Spanish Armada; Richard III murdered the Princes in the Tower; Marie-Antoinette said of the Parisian mob, 'Let them eat cake'; whilst Napoleon is best remembered for telling his wife Josephine 'not tonight'.

But not to connect with history is to live in a kind of limbo. At its best it reveals past patterns of human behaviour against which we can judge our own. Eyewitness accounts are the most accessible route into our past.

We can share in the intense reality of a fleeting moment that is unique, be drawn into it, see it in our mind's eye, almost feel as if we can hear, smell or even touch the past. The experience is more acute than reading any well-argued account of the same event by an historian, who has sifted this material, looked at other records of the same event, and laboured to produce a balanced and truthful assessment of the facts. The eyewitness account is history in the raw, a snapshot from the past that may be blurred perhaps but unmistakably captures the mood of the moment, and it is up to us what we make of it.

Those who 'saw it happen' were often ordinary men and women caught up in extraordinary circumstances, and not professional historians. Their words were often set down in the heat of the moment, with scant regard to form or grammatical correctness. The words tumble onto the page in an effort to capture, before it is lost, the thrill, anger, sense of wonder, or dim realisation that the writer is witnessing a piece of history that should be recorded. Communication is all that matters. It is the detail of these accounts that kindles

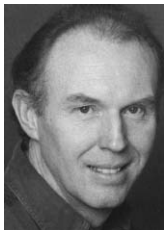
our imagination: Samuel Pepys walking through the devastation caused by the Fire of London notices 'the poor pigeons...were loath to leave their houses but hovered about the windows and balconies, till they, some of them burned their wings and fell down.' Orville Wright with modest understatement records the first man-powered flight that ever took place in the history of the world: 'The course of the flight up and down was exceedingly erratic, partly due to the irregularity of the air, and partly to lack of experience in handling this machine...' Again, it is the detail that we remember: 'Wilbur ran at the side of the machine, holding the wing to balance it on the track.' Pepys was an acute observer of an historic moment, but Orville Wright was a participator in one, and there is difference of tone where this is the case.

History doesn't have to be a list of monarchs, wars, treaties and parliamentary bills; or the elevated words of great men and women. This anthology draws for the most part on the diaries and letters of people from all walks of life, to whom 'history' just happened. Often they didn't seek fame or recognition but stepped into the spotlight for one brief moment, before resuming their normal lives. Men such as the fireman Harry Senior on board the Titanic: 'I was... swimming on my back

when the Titanic went down. I tried to get aboard a boat, but some chap hit me over the head with an oar.' Or Fanny Kemble recording the first impressions of a sensation we now take for granted – travelling at speed: 'The engine... was set off at its utmost speed, 35 miles an hour, swifter than a bird flies. You cannot conceive what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible too. I could either have read or written.'

Today, everyone with a television is an eyewitness to historical events and can experience momentous occasions first-hand as they happen: over 600 million people watched the 1969 moon-landing, for instance. Films and sound recordings of modern events will be readily available for students of history in the future, but we must pay tribute to those witnesses in the past who thought of posterity. Our ancestors reach out across the void of the centuries with experiences that touch and can make a difference to our lives, and *that* is the point of history. Or as Cicero said: 'History is the witness of the ages, the light of truth, the life of memory, the mistress of life, the messenger of antiquity.'

Notes by David Timson



Tim Pigott-Smith's busy acting career has covered stage, TV and film, and extensive work on radio and audiobook. His films have varied from *Remains of the Day* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to *Escape to Victory* and *The Four Feathers*. He has spent many seasons with the RSC and the National Theatre, the plays including *Shakespeare, Amadeus, The Iceman Cometh* and *Major Barbara*. *Fame is the Spur, Jewel in the Crown,* and *Kavanagh QC* are among his TV credits. He read *Arthur Conan Doyle, A Life* for Naxos AudioBooks and has also read numerous classics on audiobook.



Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End and off Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy Turvy*. For Naxos AudioBooks she has recorded the *Biography of Jane Austen, Classic Women's Short Stories, Heidi, The Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*.



Tom George trained at ALRA, winning the PMA Bursary and the Laurence Olivier Bursary in his second year. He was also a winner of the Carleton Hobbs competition which awarded him a contract with the BBC Radio Department with whom he continues to work frequently. Notable credits include *Absolute Power* with Stephen Fry and John Bird, *Titanic Enquiry, The Mill on the Floss* and *Remains of the Day* with Ian McDiarmid. Screen credits include *Band of Brothers* directed by Tom Hanks and *Buffalo Soldier* directed by Gregory Jordan.



After training at Central School of Speech and Drama, **Steve Hodson** joined Michael Elliot at the Exchange in Manchester for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Peer Gynt* and *Catch My Soul*. The next stop was Yorkshire Television for a three-and-a-half-year stint on *Follyfoot*. This was followed by TV series such as *Angels*, *The Legend of King Arthur* and *All Creatures Great and Small*, all interspersed with hundreds of radio plays. He has directed plays by John Crowen, Schiller and Bulgakov. On stage he has appeared in *Death and the Maiden*, *The Railway Children* and as George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* He also read the part of Curan in *King Lear* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Kerry Shale has performed his acclaimed one-man shows around the world. Other theatre work includes *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, *The Normal Heart*, *True West* and *The Odd Couple*. His TV credits include *Cracker*, *Sharpe's Rifles* and *Sherlock Holmes*. Films include *Yentl*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *102 Dalmations* and *Max*. He has won three Sony Awards for radio acting and writing. He has also recorded Poe's *Dupin* stories for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Music programmed by Sarah Butcher

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Here are more than 60 eyewitness accounts from history. Many are notable events: the **Battle of Thermopylae**, the **Black Death** in 1348, the **Great Fire of London**, the **execution of Louis XVI**, the **death of Nelson**, the **American Civil War** and the **bombing of Hiroshima**. But there are also snapshots of more ordinary life – no less memorable for all that – including working conditions during the **Industrial Revolution**, views of slave owners and slaves, **Paul Gauguin** choosing a bride on Tahiti and the arrest of **Dr Crippen**. It is a fascinating and absorbing collection, bringing the past alive as only direct memories like these can do.

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