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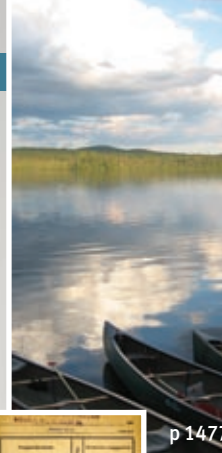
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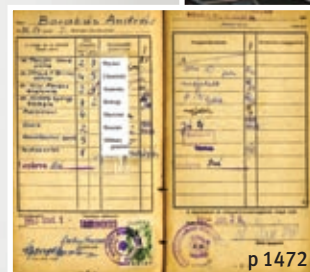
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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Everything you know is wrong

MAIN IMAGE: WELLCOME/TR-REX/BR-ROSS/LANDGETTYIMAGES;
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ON THE COVER

Florence Nightingale reappraised
Great Britons, p 1461

Oliver Twist's diet

Food, p 1450

Musical maladies

Music, p 1458

Welsh rugby and papal death

Sport, p 1435

Thanks to *Hello!* for permission to produce a pastiche of its front cover

Articles appearing in this print journal have already been published on bmj.com, and the version in print may have been shortened.

A note on how to cite each article appears at the end of each article, and this is the form the reference will take in PubMed and other indexes.

The hit of last year's Christmas issue was Rachel Vreeman and Aaron Carroll's demolition of medical myths, which garnered 21 A4 pages of media mentions within a month of publication. This year the same authors target myths with a seasonal flavour (p 1442). A dispiriting message is that there are still no genuine hangover cures—other than to consume alcohol only in moderation or not at all. At this time of year, it may be a small consolation to know that you can mix alcohol with antibiotics (other than metronidazole), although most attendees at a London clinic still mistakenly believe that you shouldn't (p 1466).

The debunking of myths emerges as the main theme of this year's Christmas issue. Gareth Payne and colleagues use sophisticated epidemiological tools to disprove the urban myth that every time Wales wins the rugby grand slam, a Pope dies—except for 1978, when Wales was really good, and two Popes died (p 1435). In his whistle stop tour of 150 years of medical education in the UK, Peter Rubin shows that any past golden age can only have been mythical (p 1468). Discontented juniors have long been threatening to emigrate or give up medicine entirely.

Far from medical students being the most gifted of their generation, a worrying proportion of Northern Irish students has trouble telling their left from their right (p 1474). And their Danish counterparts aren't obviously much sharper: half would fail the Danish citizenship test (p 1471).

Going back to the nineteenth century, Oliver Twist's heart rending pleas for more food seem to have no basis in fact: analysis of contemporary workhouse dietaries suggest that the little whinger would have

had enough to eat (p 1450, see bmj.com for a specially commissioned seasonal video). Keith Williams upends a bedpan over the myths surrounding Florence Nightingale, the Angel of Scutari (p 1461). For her manipulation of the sensationalist newspapers of the day (and theirs of her), Williams labels her “the first media-created celebrity,” which is why she adorns our *Hello!*-style cover.

While there's nothing mythical about the dangers of climbing Everest (p 1430) what is one to make of the helpful apparitions that appear to exhausted mountaineers (p 1433)? On our Christmas podcast, Jeremy Windsor fleshes out his account of meeting “Jimmy” on his final ascent of Everest.

For those feeling disoriented, this issue also confirms some cherished beliefs. The amount of bumf we receive through our letter boxes really is increasing exponentially (p 1479). The younger generation of doctors really are less courteous than their seniors, at least when it comes to requesting radiographs (p 1485). As you probably suspected, serious head banging is likely to leave you dazed and confused—if you must move your head in time with the music, choose something by Richard Clayderman rather than Mötley Crüe (p 1455).

And while research backs up the folklore that Coca-Cola has spermicidal properties, Deborah Anderson warns against using it in douches in her article (p 1454) and in our podcast. You'll find all our podcasts at <http://podcasts.bmj.com>. Starting next month, we'll be producing one every week.

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