

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Thank you - your ongoing membership makes Leonardo English possible.

If you have questions we'd love to hear from you: hi@leonardoenglish.com

Episode #052

The Guinness World Records

08 May, 2020

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can learn fascinating things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:00:22] Today we are talking about a book that I imagine you may have heard of.

[00:00:28] It's more than a book though.

[00:00:31] It is a **cult**¹.

¹ someone or something that has become very popular with a particular group of people

The Guinness World Records

[00:00:33] It's something that is turned from an argument between two men in a field into a multimillion pound empire and a feature of popular culture.

[00:00:46] That's right, today it is time to talk about the Guinness World Records.

[00:00:53] Before we get right into it, for those of you who didn't manage to listen to the last episode, I just wanted to remind you that we are now doing one episode a week that is available to everyone, that's today's episode.

[00:01:08] We will still make two episodes a week though, so to listen to the other one, you will need to be a member of Leonardo English.

[00:01:16] If you want to find out more about that change, then you can listen to the last episode that we did where I explained the reason behind it.

[00:01:25] To celebrate this change though, and the launch of our new Listener membership, you can become a Listener member for just four euros a month, 48 euros a year, if you use the promo code April4 AP R I L 4.

[00:01:44] Becoming a member of Leonardo English means that you get access to every episode we've ever released, plus the ability to request episode topics and participate in Q and A sessions.

[00:01:56] So if you are interested, the link to go to is [Leonardoenglish.com/subscribe](https://leonardoenglish.com/subscribe).

[00:02:05] Okay then let's talk about the Guinness World Records.

The Guinness World Records

[00:02:10] For those of you who are old enough to remember life before smartphones, I imagine you can [recall](#)² times where you would be chatting with a friend and you would disagree on a particular fact or figure.

[00:02:27] Maybe that was the capital city of a country, how heavy a particular type of animal was, or how many times a football team won the league.

[00:02:39] You would be sure that the answer was one thing, but your friend would be sure it was something else.

[00:02:46] Or maybe neither of you had any idea.

[00:02:50] These kinds of conversations, at least in the UK, [tended](#)³ to happen in a [pub](#)⁴ over a [pint](#)⁵ or sometimes more than one [pint](#), I should say, of beer.

[00:03:02] Now, the arrival of the internet and smartphones has removed all of the magic from this situation.

² to bring the memory of a past event into your mind, and often to give a description of what you remember

³ to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular characteristic

⁴ a place, especially in Great Britain or Ireland, where alcoholic drinks can be bought and drunk and where food is often available

⁵ a measure for liquid equal to about half a litre. Typical measurement for a glass or beer in the UK.

The Guinness World Records

[00:03:12] People now can just look it up and a conversation [barely](#)⁶ lasts a minute before someone [inevitably](#)⁷ says, I'll just Google it.

[00:03:24] But before smartphones, you will remember that it wasn't quite so easy to solve an argument, to solve these kinds of conversations.

[00:03:34] You could ask someone, another friend, but then that wasn't normally [reliable](#)⁸ either.

[00:03:41] If you had a computer with the internet back home, you could wait until you got back then to Google it.

[00:03:47] But what about before then?

[00:03:49] You would [consult](#)⁹ a book, you'd go to the library or try to find some kind of resource with the information in.

[00:03:59] So what is the connection between this and the Guinness Book Of Records, you may be asking yourself?

⁶ by the smallest amount; only just

⁷ certain to happen and unable to be avoided or prevented

⁸ Someone or something that is reliable can be trusted or believed because he, she, or it works or behaves well in the way you expect

⁹ to get information or advice from a person, book, etc. with special knowledge on a particular subject

The Guinness World Records

[00:04:07] Well, it is that the history of the Guinness World Records can be [traced](#)¹⁰ back to a very similar event.

[00:04:16] In the early 1950s a man called Sir Hugh Beaver was at a shooting event in Ireland.

[00:04:25] He was the managing director of the Guinness [brewery](#)¹¹, Ireland's famous dark beer.

[00:04:32] At this shooting event, he and the group he was with couldn't agree on what was Europe's fastest [game](#)¹² bird, the fastest bird people would hunt.

[00:04:47] It was almost half a century until Google and the worldwide web appeared, and so there was no easy way to resolve this debate.

[00:05:00] They [consulted](#),¹³ they looked through, various reference books, but couldn't find anything that answered their question, that told them what the fastest [game](#) bird in Europe was.

[00:05:14] So, Sir Hugh, the boss of Guinness brewery, had an idea.

¹⁰ to find the origin of something

¹¹ a company that makes beer or a place where beer is made

¹² wild animals and birds that are hunted for food or sport

¹³ to get information or advice from a person, book, etc. with special knowledge on a particular subject

The Guinness World Records

[00:05:21] He thought he could create a marketing campaign, a promotion for Guinness, based on the idea of solving these [pub](#) arguments, these debates that went on typically in pubs over a [pint](#) of beer.

[00:05:39] The idea was they could create a book that would solve these [pub](#) arguments so that the next time two friends were arguing over what was the heaviest kind of dog or the most goals scored in a world cup match, or the oldest person to have ever lived, they could [consult](#) this book made by Guinness and it would make them feel all happy about Guinness and perhaps even order another beer.

[00:06:12] To do this, Sir Hugh Beaver was recommended to speak to a pair of twins called Norris and Ross McWhirter.

[00:06:24] These twins, the McWhirters had [made a career out of](#)¹⁴ facts and statistics.

[00:06:32] They had an agency, a small company that supplied facts and statistics to newspapers and advertisers in London.

[00:06:43] They also, reportedly, both had a [photographic memory](#)¹⁵, which I guess is pretty useful when you're dealing in the business of lots of facts and figures.

[00:06:56] Beaver, the boss of the Guinness factory, knew he had found the right people for the job, and so he hired the twins to create his book.

¹⁴ created a career out of a particular area of expertise or experience

¹⁵ If you have a photographic memory, you are able to remember things in exact detail

The Guinness World Records

[00:07:09] And they worked [tirelessly¹⁶](#) on the project, reportedly [putting in¹⁷](#) 90-hour weeks over the course of a thirteen and a half week period, working nights, weekends, and bank holidays.

[00:07:25] And after this three month period, the first Guinness Book Of Records was done, it was complete.

[00:07:35] Around a thousand copies were printed and they were given out for free, the idea being that people could read them while they were enjoying a refreshing pint of Guinness.

[00:07:50] But when it was first published, neither the twins nor Guinness were to know what they had started.

[00:08:00] It was to go on to become the best selling [copyrighted¹⁸](#) book of all time, having sold more than 140 million copies in 100 different countries.

[00:08:14] And it is now, almost 70 years later, a huge media empire with millions of subscribers on YouTube, its own TV shows, corporate events, and more.

[00:08:29] Record-breaking is big, big business.

¹⁶ in an energetic and continuous way

¹⁷ doing, undertaking

¹⁸ under 'copyright' (the legal right to control the production and selling of a book, play, film, photograph, or piece of music)

The Guinness World Records

[00:08:34] If you are wondering how or why there is a record for the most people chewing [bubblegum](#)¹⁹ at the same time, or the largest paella, this is because you can now apply to set a Guinness World Record for, well, almost anything.

[00:08:53] I can remember when I was a kid, we used to always ask for a copy of the Guinness Book Of Records at Christmas, and it was always amazing to [leaf through](#)²⁰ this book, to [browse](#)²¹ the book, and look for the weirdest records.

[00:09:10] But over the years, the records have got stranger and stranger.

[00:09:15] Before we go onto the next part, I just wanted to share a few of my favourite records, mainly because they are all quite strange and some pretty [gross](#)²².

[00:09:29] [First up](#)²³ is a man called Donald Gorske who set the record for the most McDonald's Big Macs eaten.

[00:09:38] In 2012 he ate his 26,000th Big Mac, after eating multiple Big Macs every day for 40 years.

¹⁹ chewing gum that you can blow into the shape of a bubble

²⁰ to quickly turn the pages of a book or a magazine, reading only a little of it

²¹ to look through a book or magazine without reading everything, or to walk around a shop looking at several things without intending to buy any of them

²² extremely unpleasant

²³ Firstly

The Guinness World Records

[00:09:51] Amazingly, he has lower than average [cholesterol](#)²⁴, which I have to say I find quite hard to believe.

[00:10:00] Then there are the weird collectors, people who have managed to get into the record books for the largest collection of slightly [unorthodox](#)²⁵ things.

[00:10:12] Steve Sansweet, another American, has 300,000 individual Star Wars collection items, while a woman called Charlotte Lee has 5,631 rubber ducks, those strange yellow ducks that you can put in your bath.

[00:10:35] There are, of course, the physical records, records that are far more fun when you can actually see a picture of the person, but I'm sure you've probably seen a picture of someone like Robert Wadlow, who was the tallest man in the world, at two meters 72 centimetres.

[00:10:55] Or the woman with the longest [fingernails](#)²⁶ in the world, which I definitely find pretty disgusting.

[00:11:03] When the Guinness Book Of Records was first created, when it was first thought up as an idea, it was meant to be just this collection of facts that already exist, a collection of records that already existed in the world.

²⁴ a substance containing a lot of fat that is found in the body tissue and blood of all animals, thought to be part of the cause of heart disease if there is too much of it

²⁵ different from what is usual or expected in behaviour, ideas, methods, etc.

²⁶ the hard, slightly curved part that covers and protects the top of the end of a finger

The Guinness World Records

[00:11:19] But it has now created this entire industry of record-breaking - people, companies, and organisations wanting to be a record-breaker for almost anything.

[00:11:35] And there are big teams now at Guinness World Records that will help you, they will guide you through the process of becoming a record breaker.

[00:11:47] If you want this guided service, it's certainly not cheap, costing \$800 or a lot more if you are a company trying to promote your product, as we will discuss in a minute.

[00:12:01] And because of how popular becoming a record-breaker has become, Guinness World Records has had to set out some [guidelines²⁷](#) on what can actually make it into the book, what is a real record and what isn't.

[00:12:18] According to their website, a good [rule of thumb²⁸](#), a general rule, is 'if you can't measure it, you can't weigh it and you can't count it, then it's probably not a record'.

[00:12:34] It is a pretty fascinating concept, the idea that there has been this entire industry created based on encouraging people to do weird things and break records, to be a Guinness world record breaker, even if the thing that they are doing probably is so strange that nobody else will have attempted it before.

²⁷ information intended to advise people on how something should be done or what something should be

²⁸ a practical and approximate way of doing or measuring something

The Guinness World Records

[00:13:00] Things like the fastest person to run the hundred metres are of course, perfectly [valid](#)²⁹ records, but the biggest [mosaic](#)³⁰ of postage stamps or the biggest line of cereal boxes that have been knocked over like dominoes?

[00:13:20] Well, I wonder how many people have ever actually tried that before.

[00:13:26] But this leads us on to discovering how Guinness World Records has become such a huge industry and a huge business.

[00:13:37] It is the big companies, the [sponsors](#)³¹ who are using Guinness World Records as a way of marketing or drawing attention to what they do.

[00:13:48] That world record for the biggest [mosaic](#) of postage stamps that I mentioned a minute ago?

[00:13:54] That was set by the Spanish postal service.

[00:13:58] The record for the largest [loop the loop](#)³² in a car, you know when a car drives up and around in a circle and it goes upside down?

²⁹ based on truth or reason; able to be accepted

³⁰ a pattern or picture made using many small pieces of coloured stone or glass

³¹ to support a person, organisation, or activity by giving money, encouragement, or other help

³² a vertical circle in the air

The Guinness World Records

[00:14:07] That record was set by the car maker Jaguar to promote the launch of a new [model](#)³³.

[00:14:16] And the record for the most cereal boxes that were knocked over in a line like dominoes?

[00:14:22] [Surprise, surprise](#)³⁴, that was Kellogg's.

[00:14:27] And of course, these companies are paying large, large sums of money to Guinness World Records for all this, for the promotion of their products.

[00:14:39] When you think about the history of the Guinness Book Of Records and how this little book was first created as a way to promote Guinness to solve [pub](#) arguments, I think it's a fascinating [twist](#)³⁵ that now it is turned into this huge publishing and media empire that [relies](#)³⁶ to a large extent on promoting other companies, allowing them to create their own records and of course [pay handsomely](#)³⁷ for the [privilege](#)³⁸.

³³ a type of something, e.g. a new model of car

³⁴ said when someone has done something or when something has happened in a way that you expected and that you do not approve of

³⁵ a change in the way in which something happens

³⁶ to depend on or trust someone or something

³⁷ pay a lot of money for

³⁸ an opportunity to do something special or enjoyable

The Guinness World Records

[00:15:14] Even more interesting and quite funny on one level is that Guinness, the company, Guinness the drink, no longer has anything to do really with Guinness World Records.

[00:15:27] The company itself [changed hands](#)³⁹ several times, it was sold several times, but has kept the [iconic](#)⁴⁰ name of Guinness.

[00:15:39] So Guinness - the drink - gets all of this [publicity](#)⁴¹ every time someone says the name Guinness World Records, it gets it for free.

[00:15:50] It has certainly come a long way and has had an interesting history for a book that was written in 13 and a half weeks and meant to be given away for free and enjoyed over a cold [pint](#) of Guinness.

[00:16:04] Okay, then that is it for today's episode of English Learning for Curious Minds.

[00:16:14] As always, I would love to know what you thought of the show, so please do write in, the email is hi H i@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:16:25] As I said at the start of this podcast, we have made a few changes to the way that the podcasts work.

³⁹ be bought and sold

⁴⁰ very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time

⁴¹ the activity of making certain that someone or something attracts a lot of interest or attention from many people, or the attention received as a result of this activity

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #052
The Guinness World Records

[00:16:32] So if you want access to every single episode plus two new ones a week, then you should head to the Leonardo English website and until May the 10th which is this coming Sunday, you can save 20% on the normal cost of our Listener membership with the code APRIL4, A P R I L 4, so it's just four euros a month, 48 euros a year.

[00:16:58] But be quick as that only lasts until midnight on Sunday.

[00:17:03] [00:17:03] The link to go to is [Leonardoenglish.com/subscribe](https://leonardoenglish.com/subscribe).

[00:17:09] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:17:14] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I will catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Cult	someone or something that has become very popular with a particular group of people
Recall	to bring the memory of a past event into your mind, and often to give a description of what you remember
Tended	to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular characteristic
Pub	a place, especially in Great Britain or Ireland, where alcoholic drinks can be bought and drunk and where food is often available
Pint	a measure for liquid equal to about half a litre. Typical measurement for a glass of beer in the UK.
Barely	by the smallest amount; only just
Inevitably	certain to happen and unable to be avoided or prevented
Reliable	Someone or something that is reliable can be trusted or believed because he, she, or it works or behaves well in the way you expect
Consult	to get information or advice from a person, book, etc. with special knowledge on a particular subject

The Guinness World Records

Traced	to find the origin of something
Brewery	a company that makes beer or a place where beer is made
Game	wild animals and birds that are hunted for food or sport
Consulted	to get information or advice from a person, book, etc. with special knowledge on a particular subject
Made a career out of	created a career out of a particular area of expertise or experience
Photographic memory	If you have a photographic memory, you are able to remember things in exact detail
Tirelessly	in an energetic and continuous way
Putting in	doing, undertaking
Copyrighted	under 'copyright' (the legal right to control the production and selling of a book, play, film, photograph, or piece of music)
Bubblegum	chewing gum that you can blow into the shape of a bubble
Leaf through	to quickly turn the pages of a book or a magazine, reading only a little of it
Browse	to look through a book or magazine without reading everything, or to walk around a shop looking at several things without intending

The Guinness World Records

	to buy any of them
Gross	extremely unpleasant
First up	Firstly
Cholesterol	a substance containing a lot of fat that is found in the body tissue and blood of all animals, thought to be part of the cause of heart disease if there is too much of it
Unorthodox	different from what is usual or expected in behaviour, ideas, methods, etc.
Fingernails	the hard, slightly curved part that covers and protects the top of the end of a finger
Guidelines	information intended to advise people on how something should be done or what something should be
Rule of thumb	a practical and approximate way of doing or measuring something
Valid	based on truth or reason; able to be accepted
Mosaic	a pattern or picture made using many small pieces of coloured stone or glass
Sponsors	to support a person, organisation, or activity by giving money, encouragement, or other help

The Guinness World Records

Loop the loop	a vertical circle in the air
Model	a type of something, e.g. a new model of car
Surprise, surprise	said when someone has done something or when something has happened in a way that you expected and that you do not approve of
Twist	a change in the way in which something happens
Relies	to depend on or trust someone or something
Pay handsomely	pay a lot of money for
Privilege	an opportunity to do something special or enjoyable
Changed hands	be bought and sold
Iconic	very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time
Publicity	the activity of making certain that someone or something attracts a lot of interest or attention from many people, or the attention received as a result of this activity

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #052
The Guinness World Records

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.