

# ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS





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**Episode #041**  
**The Great Train Robbery**  
**April 3, 2020**

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can learn fascinating things about the world and listen to weird and wonderful stories at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about The Great Train [Robbery](#)<sup>1</sup>.

[00:00:30] In 1963, just outside London, a train carrying today's [equivalent](#)<sup>2</sup> of 55 million pounds, 65 million dollars, was stopped.

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<sup>1</sup> the crime of stealing from somewhere or someone

<sup>2</sup> having the same amount, value, purpose, qualities, etc.

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:00:43] A group of men got onto the train and 15 minutes later they had managed to escape with all of the money.

[00:00:54] Today we are going to tell this story - the story of one of the greatest [thefts](#)<sup>3</sup> in British criminal history.

[00:01:05] Before we do that, though, this is just my chance to remind those of you listening to this podcast on Spotify, iVoox, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts that you can get a copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast over on the website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:28] If you haven't yet tried listening to the podcast with the transcript in front of you, well you are [missing a trick](#)<sup>4</sup>, it means that you can follow every single word and improve your English way faster than you would do just by listening.

[00:01:45] And it also comes with the key vocabulary, which means that you can learn new words and expressions at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:01:55] So go and check that out.

[00:01:56] It's at [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com)

[00:02:02] Okay then let's talk about this [fantastic](#)<sup>5</sup> crime.

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<sup>3</sup> (the act of) dishonestly taking something that belongs to someone else and keeping it

<sup>4</sup> missing out, not taking advantage of an opportunity or situation to gain some benefit for oneself

<sup>5</sup> normally this means 'very good', but it can also be used to mean very unusual, strange, or unexpected

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:02:08] At about three o'clock in the morning on the 8th of August, 1963 a [Royal Mail](#)<sup>6</sup> train was on its way from Glasgow to London.

[00:02:22] It was carrying about 2 million pounds in [cash](#)<sup>7</sup>, that's about 55 million pounds in today's money.

[00:02:31] It was carrying so much [cash](#) because there had just been a bank holiday, a public holiday, in Scotland.

[00:02:40] The [cash](#) it was carrying was a [whole load](#)<sup>8</sup> of old bank notes, old money, and it was carrying this old money to London to be burned and taken out of [circulation](#)<sup>9</sup>.

[00:02:57] So, at three o'clock in the morning, the train slowed down as the driver saw a red signal telling the train to stop.

[00:03:08] They stopped, but the signal was still red.

[00:03:12] So the driver got out of the train to investigate.

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<sup>6</sup> the postal service in the UK

<sup>7</sup> money in the form of notes and coins, rather than cheques or credit cards

<sup>8</sup> a large amount

<sup>9</sup> the process in which something such as information, money, or goods passes from one person to another

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:03:17] When he went to look at the light, he was **grabbed**<sup>10</sup> from behind and a man said, in a **harsh**<sup>11</sup> voice, 'if you make a sound, I'll kill you'.

[00:03:29] They took him back to the train.

[00:03:32] They **tied up**<sup>12</sup> the other workers in the first two **carriages**<sup>13</sup> of the train and then they **detached**<sup>14</sup> the first two **carriages**, they separated the first two **carriages** of the train from the rest of the train.

[00:03:48] And then the first two **carriages** were driven for a few miles further up the **track**<sup>15</sup>.

[00:03:56] What this meant was that the workers in the **rear**<sup>16</sup> part of the train, the bit behind, they didn't have any idea that anything was wrong.

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<sup>10</sup> taken hold of something or someone suddenly and roughly

<sup>11</sup> unpleasant, unkind, cruel, or more severe than is necessary

<sup>12</sup> to make a person unable to move by tying a rope or something similar around their body or part of their body

<sup>13</sup> any of the separate parts of a train in which the passengers sit

<sup>14</sup> to separate or remove something from something else that it is connected to

<sup>15</sup> the pair of long metal bars fixed on the ground at an equal distance from each other, along which trains travel

<sup>16</sup> at the back of something

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:04:06] They thought they had just stopped because of a [routine](#)<sup>17</sup>, a normal problem.

[00:04:13] When the train had moved a few miles up the [track](#), the [gang](#)<sup>18</sup> of [robbers](#)<sup>19</sup>, they managed to get into the second [carriage](#) where all of the [cash](#), all of the money, was being kept.

[00:04:26] They [overpowered](#)<sup>20</sup> the guards and got all the money out.

[00:04:31] They threw the 120 bags full of [cash](#) down an [embankment](#)<sup>21</sup> to their [accomplices](#)<sup>22</sup>, their [fellow](#)<sup>23</sup> [robbers](#), who were waiting with cars nearby, the [getaway](#)<sup>24</sup> drivers.

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<sup>17</sup> done as part of what usually happens, and not for any special reason

<sup>18</sup> a group of criminals who work together

<sup>19</sup> people who steal from others

<sup>20</sup> to defeat someone by having greater strength or power

<sup>21</sup> an artificial slope made of earth and/or stones

<sup>22</sup> a person who helps someone else to commit a crime or to do something morally wrong

<sup>23</sup> used of people or a person with whom you share something, esp. the same kind of job, interest, or experience

<sup>24</sup> an occasion when someone leaves a place quickly, usually after committing a crime

The Great Train Robbery

[00:04:47] In **a matter of**<sup>25</sup> 15 minutes, the **thieves**<sup>26</sup> had escaped with over 2 million pounds, as I said, about 55 million pounds in today's money.

[00:04:59] And this was all cash, right? It was all paper.

[00:05:03] It weighed about two and a half tonnes.

[00:05:07] So that's heavier than the average car.

[00:05:10] That was how much money they stole.

[00:05:13] So it was pretty impressive to get all of that out of the train in under 15 minutes.

[00:05:21] The police were **alerted**<sup>27</sup> as soon as the guards in the back section of the train realised that something was wrong.

[00:05:30] And of course the police spent the next day **on the hunt for**<sup>28</sup> the criminals.

[00:05:36] But the **gang** was nowhere to be found.

[00:05:40] The police tried everything.

[00:05:42] They spent all day asking around in the local houses and farms.

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<sup>25</sup> only

<sup>26</sup> people who steal from others

<sup>27</sup> Warned, told

<sup>28</sup> looking for

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:05:47] They sent a special [robbery<sup>29</sup> squad<sup>30</sup>](#) to the area - this was a team of people who were familiar with the criminal [underground<sup>31</sup>](#) to see if they would have any luck.

[00:06:00] They searched the houses of known criminals.

[00:06:03] They questioned the girlfriends and known [associates<sup>32</sup>](#) of some of the UK's most [infamous<sup>33</sup>](#) criminals.

[00:06:13] But still they had no luck.

[00:06:17] Five days after the [robbery](#), though, on August the 13th they received a [tip-off<sup>34</sup>](#), a suggestion, from a local farmer that they should go and look into a place called Leatherslade farm, a farm which was about 20 miles or 30 kilometres, from the scene of the crime.

[00:06:41] The farmer said that he had seen lots of people [coming and going<sup>35</sup>](#), there had been an increase in activity, and it was definitely [abnormal<sup>36</sup>](#).

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<sup>29</sup> the crime of stealing from somewhere or someone

<sup>30</sup> a small group of people trained to work together as a unit

<sup>31</sup> below the surface of the earth; below ground, similar to 'underworld'

<sup>32</sup> people who are closely connected to another person as a companion, friend, or business partner

<sup>33</sup> famous for something considered bad

<sup>34</sup> a secret warning or piece of secret information

<sup>35</sup> frequent movement

<sup>36</sup> different from what is usual or average, especially in a way that is bad



## The Great Train Robbery

[00:06:53] So he said to the police, you should go and have a look at it.

[00:06:56] When they arrived at the property, they found it [deserted](#)<sup>37</sup>.

[00:07:01] But they knew pretty soon that they were [onto something](#)<sup>38</sup>.

[00:07:07] They saw 20 of the [Royal Mail](#) bags, with no money inside of course, and they also found the [getaway](#) vehicles, the cars used for the [robbery](#).

[00:07:21] But the [thieves](#) had been pretty careful.

[00:07:24] They had [wiped everything down](#)<sup>39</sup>, they had cleaned the property, to avoid leaving any [fingerprints](#) or things that would be [clues](#)<sup>40</sup> for the police.

[00:07:37] However, the police found a game of Monopoly , alongside real money.

[00:07:44] The men had so much [cash](#) that instead of playing with Monopoly money, with the fake money, they just played with real money.

[00:07:54] I mean, they had two tonnes of it, so why not?

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<sup>37</sup> If a place is deserted, there are no people in it

<sup>38</sup> To be onto something or someone is to be aware of other information relating to the situation, esp. when someone is trying to deceive you

<sup>39</sup> to clean the surface of something, such as a table, with a cloth

<sup>40</sup> signs or some information that helps you to find the answer to a problem, question, or mystery

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:08:00] Anyway, while playing Monopoly was no doubt good fun, it wasn't a good idea because on one of the Monopoly pieces, on the game pieces, the police found [fingerprints](#) which helped identify some of the men.

[00:08:18] A week later, they managed to [track down](#)<sup>41</sup> and arrest one member of the [gang](#) and within the next two weeks, thanks to [tip-offs](#), thanks to people telling the police about the identity of some of the others, they had managed to start [tracking](#)<sup>42</sup> the rest of the [gang](#).

[00:08:40] They'd managed to identify a lot of the men and they'd managed to locate some of them.

[00:08:46] The police discovered that the gang [consisted](#)<sup>43</sup> of a total of 17 people, 15 of whom were actually physically present at the robbery

[00:08:58] So who were these men?

[00:09:00] What did they all do?

[00:09:02] Well, it really was a bit of a mix, a [motley crew](#)<sup>44</sup>, and they all played a slightly different role.

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<sup>41</sup> to find

<sup>42</sup> locating

<sup>43</sup> to be comprised of, made up of

<sup>44</sup> a diverse and often poorly organised group

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:09:11] There were the big guys, the guys who were there to [threaten](#)<sup>45</sup> the drivers, to be [the muscle](#)<sup>46</sup>.

[00:09:18] There were the [getaway](#) drivers, the men who were waiting in the cars.

[00:09:24] Then there were those responsible for things like dividing up the money and for buying the farm.

[00:09:34] We know who they all are now apart from one person, and that man was the [man inside](#)<sup>47</sup>, the person with the inside knowledge of the [Royal Mail](#).

[00:09:48] The person who knew exactly when and where the train would be, the person who knew where the money would be and who told the gang how to actually [get away](#)<sup>48</sup> with the attack.

[00:10:02] The true identity of that man, although there are some theories, the true identity has never been revealed.

[00:10:12] And now that all of the men who took part in the [robbery](#) are no longer around, they've all [passed away](#)<sup>49</sup>, his identity will never be revealed.

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<sup>45</sup> to tell someone that you will kill or hurt them or cause problems if they do not do what you want

<sup>46</sup> (informal) the strong people

<sup>47</sup> if you are a 'person inside', you have information about something that you could only get through being involved with that organisation

<sup>48</sup> to succeed in doing, especially something bad

<sup>49</sup> polite expression for die

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:10:24] But the rest of the men were captured, they were arrested by the police.

[00:10:30] This didn't happen at the same time, and it wasn't until April of the next year that they were actually [sentenced<sup>50</sup>](#), that they were sent to prison.

[00:10:42] But the story [most certainly<sup>51</sup>](#) does not end there.

[00:10:48] Several of the men escaped from prison, running away to places like Belgium, France, Canada, Australia, and Brazil.

[00:11:00] The most famous [escapee<sup>52</sup>](#), the most famous of the men who managed to escape, was called Ronnie Biggs.

[00:11:09] He was only 32 when he was caught and he was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

[00:11:17] But after 15 months in prison, he managed to escape, climbing over the prison walls of a maximum security prison in London.

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<sup>50</sup> to decide and say officially what a punishment will be

<sup>51</sup> definitely

<sup>52</sup> someone who escapes

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:11:30] He **fled**<sup>53</sup>, he ran away, first to Brussels and then to Paris where he had **plastic surgery**<sup>54</sup> to change his appearance, for obvious reasons.

[00:11:42] He then **fled** to the other side of the world, to Australia, and when the police got close to him there, he **fled** on a passenger ship with a fake passport to Panama and then to Brazil.

[00:11:59] In Brazil, he was safe, comparatively speaking, as Brazil didn't have an **extradition**<sup>55</sup> **treaty**<sup>56</sup> with the UK.

[00:12:08] This meant that the Brazilian government didn't have to **deport**<sup>57</sup> him, to send him back to the UK, to be **tried**<sup>58</sup>.

[00:12:17] So he lived pretty openly in Brazil for almost 30 years.

[00:12:23] He couldn't work though, given his status as a known criminal.

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<sup>53</sup> past simple and past participle of flee (to escape from)

<sup>54</sup> a medical operation to bring a damaged area of skin, and sometimes bone, back to its usual appearance, or to improve a person's appearance

<sup>55</sup> the act of making someone return for trial to another country or state where they have been accused of doing something illegal

<sup>56</sup> a written agreement between two or more countries, formally approved and signed by their leaders

<sup>57</sup> to force someone to leave a country, especially someone who has no legal right to be there or who has broken the law

<sup>58</sup> past of 'try' to examine a person accused of committing a crime in a law court by asking them questions and considering known facts, and then decide if they are guilty



## English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #041

### The Great Train Robbery

[00:12:29] So he used to host barbecues at his house.

[00:12:34] Tourists could pay to go and have a barbecue with one of the most famous [robbers](#) of all time.

[00:12:43] However, the story doesn't end particularly happily with [Caipirinhas](#)<sup>59</sup> on the beach for Ronnie Biggs.

[00:12:53] His health [deteriorated](#)<sup>60</sup>, it got worse, and he [longed to](#)<sup>61</sup> return to the UK.

[00:13:01] And in 2001 he did return, but he was immediately arrested.

[00:13:08] Even though he was in his seventies he had [committed](#)<sup>62</sup> a pretty serious crime, and he still had 28 years to [serve](#)<sup>63</sup> of his sentence.

[00:13:20] So he was put back in prison, and he [served](#) another eight years.

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<sup>59</sup> a Brazilian alcoholic drink made with Brazilian rum, lime juice, sugar, and ice

<sup>60</sup> to become worse

<sup>61</sup> wanted very much

<sup>62</sup> done something illegal

<sup>63</sup> to spend a period of time in a job or activity

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:13:26] In 2009 he was released from prison on what's called '[compassionate](#)<sup>64</sup>  
[grounds](#)<sup>65</sup>', basically he was very ill.

[00:13:36] And he died four years later in 2013.

[00:13:40] I should add that although this crime has gone down in history and has been [romanticised](#)<sup>66</sup> quite a lot, including I guess what we're doing here on this podcast, it was obviously a pretty serious crime and not completely [victim](#)<sup>67</sup>-free.

[00:14:01] During the robbery, one of the guards of the train, a man called Jack Mills, was hit over the head with an [iron bar](#)<sup>68</sup>.

[00:14:12] Although he wasn't killed, he suffered [severe](#)<sup>69</sup> brain damage and never properly recovered from his injuries.

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<sup>64</sup> showing compassion (a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them)

<sup>65</sup> reasons

<sup>66</sup> to talk about something in a way that makes it sound better than it really is, or to believe that something is better than it really is

<sup>67</sup> someone or something that has been hurt, damaged, or killed or has suffered, either because of the actions of someone or something else, or because of illness or chance

<sup>68</sup> a large piece of hard metal

<sup>69</sup> causing very great pain, difficulty, worry, damage, etc.; very serious

## The Great Train Robbery

[00:14:21] So it was definitely not [victimless<sup>70</sup>](#), the crime.

[00:14:26] And it obviously was a pretty serious crime.

[00:14:29] It was the biggest [cash robbery](#), the biggest [theft<sup>71</sup>](#) of physical money in Britain for 40 years, until it was [eclipsed<sup>72</sup>](#) by a robbery in Northern Ireland in 2004.

[00:14:44] In any case, The Great Train Robbery has gone down in history, and you will find references to it throughout British [pop culture<sup>73</sup>](#), from Beatles [lyrics<sup>74</sup>](#) to Agatha Christie, from Inspector Clouseau to James Bond, it's everywhere and it has had an impact on British culture like no other crime, I guess.

[00:15:13] Not just because it's a huge [robbery](#), but it's also a story of escapes from prison, a global [manhunt<sup>75</sup>](#), and then the ultimately sad end for many of the robbers.

[00:15:27] Okay then, that is it for today's episode.

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<sup>70</sup> In a victimless crime no one suffers directly, sometimes because the people affected by the crime have agreed to take part in it

<sup>71</sup> (the act of) dishonestly taking something that belongs to someone else and keeping it

<sup>72</sup> become more successful or important than something else

<sup>73</sup> music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people

<sup>74</sup> the words of a song

<sup>75</sup> an organised search for a person, especially a criminal

The Great Train Robbery

[00:15:32] I hope you've enjoyed it and I certainly hope that it hasn't [inspired](#)<sup>76</sup> you to start [robbing](#) trains.

[00:15:39] As I said, the story doesn't end well.

[00:15:42] As a quick reminder, if you are looking for the transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast, you can find that at [leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:15:53] It is a really useful resource for following along and improving your English at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:16:00] So I definitely recommend going and checking that out if you haven't done so already.

[00:16:07] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:16:12] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:16:14] You stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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<sup>76</sup> to make someone feel that they want to do something and can do it

## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	the crime of stealing from somewhere or someone
<b>Equivalent</b>	having the same amount, value, purpose, qualities, etc.
<b>Thefts</b>	(the act of) dishonestly taking something that belongs to someone else and keeping it
<b>Miss a trick</b>	missing out, not taking advantage of an opportunity or situation to gain some benefit for oneself
<b>Fantastic</b>	normally this means 'very good', but it can also be used to mean very unusual, strange, or unexpected
<b>Royal Mail</b>	the postal service in the UK
<b>Cash</b>	money in the form of notes and coins, rather than cheques or credit cards
<b>Whole load</b>	a large amount
<b>Circulation</b>	the process in which something such as information, money, or goods passes from one person to another
<b>Grabbed</b>	taken hold of something or someone suddenly and roughly
<b>Harsh</b>	unpleasant, unkind, cruel, or more severe than is necessary



The Great Train Robbery

<b>Tied up</b>	to make a person unable to move by tying a rope or something similar around their body or part of their body
<b>Carriage</b>	any of the separate parts of a train in which the passengers sit
<b>Detach</b>	to separate or remove something from something else that it is connected to
<b>Track</b>	the pair of long metal bars fixed on the ground at an equal distance from each other, along which trains travel
<b>Rear</b>	at the back of something
<b>Routine</b>	done as part of what usually happens, and not for any special reason
<b>Gang</b>	a group of criminals who work together
<b>Robbers</b>	people who steal from others
<b>Overpowered</b>	to defeat someone by having greater strength or power
<b>Embankment</b>	an artificial slope made of earth and/or stones
<b>Accomplices</b>	a person who helps someone else to commit a crime or to do something morally wrong
<b>Fellow</b>	used of people or a person with whom you share something, esp. the same kind of job, interest, or experience

## The Great Train Robbery

<b>Getaway</b>	an occasion when someone leaves a place quickly, usually after committing a crime
<b>A matter of</b>	only
<b>Thieves</b>	people who steal from others
<b>Alerted</b>	warned, told
<b>On the hunt for</b>	looking for
<b>Robbery</b>	the crime of stealing from somewhere or someone
<b>Squad</b>	a small group of people trained to work together as a unit
<b>Underground</b>	below the surface of the earth; below ground, similar to 'underworld'
<b>Associates</b>	people who are closely connected to another person as a companion, friend, or business partner
<b>Infamous</b>	famous for something considered bad
<b>Tip-off</b>	a secret warning or piece of secret information
<b>Coming and going</b>	frequent movement
<b>Abnormal</b>	different from what is usual or average, especially in a way that is bad
<b>Deserted</b>	If a place is deserted, there are no people in it

## The Great Train Robbery

<b>Be onto something</b>	To be onto something or someone is to be aware of other information relating to the situation, esp. when someone is trying to deceive you
<b>Wipe sth down</b>	to clean the surface of something, such as a table, with a cloth
<b>Fingerprints</b>	the pattern of curved lines on the end of a finger or thumb that is different in every person, or a mark left by this pattern
<b>Clues</b>	a sign or some information that helps you to find the answer to a problem, question, or mystery
<b>Track down</b>	to find
<b>Tracking</b>	locating
<b>Consisted</b>	to be comprised of, made up of
<b>Motley crew</b>	a diverse and often poorly organised group
<b>Threaten</b>	to tell someone that you will kill or hurt them or cause problems if they do not do what you want
<b>The muscle</b>	(informal) the strong people
<b>Man inside</b>	if you are a 'person inside', you have information about something that you could only get through being involved with that organisation
<b>Get away with</b>	to succeed in doing, especially something bad

## The Great Train Robbery

something

**Passed away**

polite expression for die

**Sentence**

to decide and say officially what a punishment will be

**Most certainly**

definitely

**Escapee**

someone who escapes

**Fled**

past simple and past participle of flee (to escape from)

**Plastic surgery**

a medical operation to bring a damaged area of skin, and sometimes bone, back to its usual appearance, or to improve a person's appearance

**Extradition**

the act of making someone return for trial to another country or state where they have been accused of doing something illegal

**Treaty**

a written agreement between two or more countries, formally approved and signed by their leaders

**Deport**

to force someone to leave a country, especially someone who has no legal right to be there or who has broken the law

**Tried**

past of 'try' to examine a person accused of committing a crime in a law court by asking them questions and considering known facts, and then decide if they are guilty

The Great Train Robbery

<b>Caipirinhas</b>	a Brazilian alcoholic drink made with Brazilian rum, lime juice, sugar, and ice
<b>Deteriorated</b>	to become worse
<b>Longed to</b>	wanted very much
<b>Committed</b>	done something illegal
<b>Serve</b>	to spend a period of time in a job or activity
<b>Compassionate</b>	showing compassion (a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them)
<b>Grounds</b>	reasons
<b>Romanticised</b>	to talk about something in a way that makes it sound better than it really is, or to believe that something is better than it really is
<b>Victim</b>	someone or something that has been hurt, damaged, or killed or has suffered, either because of the actions of someone or something else, or because of illness or chance
<b>Iron bar</b>	a large piece of hard metal
<b>Severe</b>	causing very great pain, difficulty, worry, damage, etc.; very serious
<b>Victimless</b>	In a victimless crime no one suffers directly, sometimes because the



## The Great Train Robbery

people affected by the crime have agreed to take part in it

### Theft

(the act of) dishonestly taking something that belongs to someone else and keeping it

### Eclipsed

become more successful or important than something else

### Pop culture

music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people

### Lyrics

the words of a song

### Manhunt

an organised search for a person, especially a criminal

### Inspire

to make someone feel that they want to do something and can do it

*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?*

*You can email us at [hi@leonardoenglish.com](mailto:hi@leonardoenglish.com).*