



1853

Henry Cooper, the Scugdale Giant

Stories and myths of giants have been told for thousands of years. One of the most famous stories comes from the Bible and tells of Goliath, a giant that was killed by a boy called David, who with a single pebble fired from his slingshot felled the mighty Goliath when the missile struck him between his eyes.

A local legend tells of a giant who lived on the North Yorkshire Moors whose name was Wade. Wade was said to be as tall as a large tree. Another was Gogmagog, often said to be the last great giant to live in Britain. However, these tales are based on myths and folklore and may not be true.

Nevertheless, there have been many real-life, natural giants. These are ordinary people who have grown to extraordinary height. One such person was Henry Alexander Cooper. Henry was born in 1853 and when he was a young teenager he went to work on a farm in Scugdale. He fell ill with fever and was confined to his bed for a long time. During this period Henry had an abnormal growth spurt and by the time he was well again he had reached a height of nearly 8 feet tall. He was said to have hands 13 inches long and feet measuring an enormous 17 inches. Henry had become the tallest man in England.

One day a fairground owner spotted Henry and invited him to join his travelling circus. Henry then came to the attention of Mr P. T. Barnum, the most famous showman and circus owner in the world, who persuaded Henry to join his travelling show and tour across America and Canada, billed as 'The Yorkshire Giant - The Tallest Man in the World'. Henry became famous.

He married a tall American lady and had a family, but died in Canada at the age of 46. Quite an amazing adventure for someone who once worked as a farmhand in the quiet backwater of Scugdale, North Yorkshire!



QUESTIONS

1. Which book tells the story of David and Goliath?
2. How did Goliath die?
3. Which giant was said to be the size of a large tree?
4. Who was said to be the last great giant to live in Britain?
5. Why should we doubt some of the tales above?
6. Who was somebody who was a genuine real-life giant?
7. What job did this person have when he was a young teenager?
8. What happened during the period that Henry Cooper spent a long time in bed due to being ill?
9. How tall was Henry and how big were his hands and feet?
10. What is this in metric measurements?
11. What job did Henry end up doing and where did he do this?
12. Working in pairs or groups measure your height, hands and feet and compare them with Henry's. Work out how much bigger he was than you. Perhaps you can draw his hands and feet on a piece of paper and then draw round your own to compare them.

Find out more:

- Information on Henry Cooper:
<http://www.thetallestman.com/henryalexandercooper.htm>
- Story of P.T. Barnum and his circus:
<http://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/circus-sensation-pt-barnums-greatest-wheezes/>