

CUCKOO
BUSH

GOTHAM HISTORY

Gotham is now a friendly village popular with families, but a few hundred years ago its residents had a reputation for "madness". One story goes that King John, also the villain in the legend of Robin Hood, was due to travel through Gotham on his way to nearby Nottingham. Any road the king travelled on would become a public highway, so the villagers are said to have feigned madness to deter the king - as it was thought to be infectious.

Their absurd acts included building a fence around a bush to prevent a cuckoo escaping, and attempting to drown an eel in a pond. The trick worked, leading to the saying: "There are more fools pass through Gotham than remain in it." Villagers were also dubbed the Wise Men of Gotham. Word of the supposedly foolish acts spread, and they were collected in various books including The Merry Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham, published in 1565.

The American author Washington Irving became aware of the tales and was the first person to link Gotham in England with New York in the US. He repeatedly referred to Manhattan as Gotham when writing, in 1807, in the Salmagundi papers, a satirical periodical mocking New Yorkers. Gotham then became a popular nickname for New York City and is still used today, in shop names and notably at the Gotham Center for New York City History.

So how did the Batman stories come to be set in Gotham City, rather than New York? Batman made his debut in issue 27 of Detective Comics, in 1939. His setting was referred to as an unnamed "teeming metropolis" in issue 29, but by issue 31 it was explicitly identified as "New York".

Writer Bill Finger said he changed the name to Gotham after looking through a phone book and seeing the name Gotham Jewelers. While Gotham village is pronounced goat-em, stemming from "goat town", the pronunciation goth-am was adopted for Batman. The link with Nottinghamshire has only been acknowledged by Batman writers in recent years.

In a story called Cityscape, written by Dennis O'Neill in The Batman Chronicles #6 in 1996, a villain plotting murder explains how the Gotham of the Batman universe was created. He enlists the help of an innocent man to build an asylum in the forest outside the town of Bludhaven, and proposes naming it Gotham "after a village in England where, according to common belief, all are bereft of their wits".

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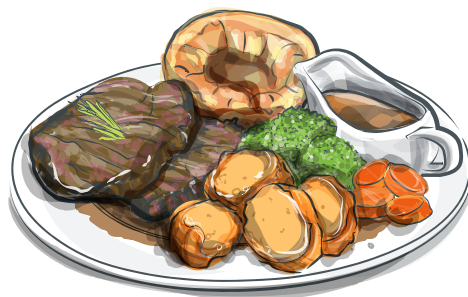
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