

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,  
All the King's Horses and all the King's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

The real story behind the rhyme dates back to the English Civil War (1642). Humpty was a huge cannon mounted atop a high wall-like church tower. During the Siege of Colchester, The tower was hit by enemy cannon fire and Humpty suffered a great fall. There was no fixing the cannon or the tower, and the Humpty Dumpty rhyme was born.

Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool?  
Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!  
One for the master, one for the dame  
And one for the little boy who lives down the lane.

Baa Baa Black Sheep references the importance of the wool industry to the economy from the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century. The rhyme is also thought to be a political satire of the export tax imposed in Britain in 1275 under the rule of King Edward I.

Mary Mary quite contrary,  
How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells and cockle shells  
And pretty maids all in a row.

This rhyme is a reference to Mary Queen of Scots, often called Bloody Mary, (1542-1587). The garden refers to growing cemeteries, as she filled them with Protestants. Silver bells and cockle shells were instruments of torture and the maiden was a device used to behead people.

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Sing a song of sixpence a pocket full of rye,  
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.  
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,  
Oh wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?

It was likely based on a spoof by a court jester who thought it would be hilarious to trick the king by putting live birds into a pie shell. At the time, cooked blackbirds were considered a delicacy and would have been served to the king.

London Bridge bridge is falling down,  
Falling down down, falling down,  
London Bridge bridge is falling down,  
My fair lady.

Take a key and lock her up,  
Lock her up, lock her up,  
Take a key and lock her up,  
My fair lady.

This nursery rhyme refers to the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII of England. Boleyn was accused of adultery and was ultimately executed.

Three blind mice. Three blind mice.  
See how they run. See how they run.  
They all ran after the farmer's wife,  
Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,  
Did you ever see such a sight in your life,  
As three blind mice.

The vicious farmer's wife in this rhyme is believed to refer to Queen Mary I, the daughter of King Henry VIII. Mary, a staunch Catholic, was so well known for her persecution of Protestants that she was given the nickname "Bloody Mary." When three Protestant bishops were convicted of plotting against Mary, she had them burnt at the stake. However, it was mistakenly believed that she had them blinded and dismembered, as is inferred in the rhyme.

Little Boy Blue come blow your horn,  
The sheep's in the meadow the cow's in the corn.  
But where's the boy who looks after the sheep?  
He's under a haystack fast asleep.  
Will you wake him? No, not I - for if I do, he's sure to cry.

Little Boy Blue may refer to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1475-1530). Wolsey was an arrogant and wealthy self-made man and had many enemies in England. After obtaining his degree from Oxford at the age of fifteen, he was dubbed the "Boy Bachelor." The words "come blow your horn" likely refer to his incessant bragging.

Little Jack Horner, Sat in a corner,  
Eating a Christmas pie, He put in his thumb,  
And pulled out a plum, And said What a good boy am I.

During the reign of Henry VIII at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, many Roman Catholic priests were in fear of their lives. In order to carry favor with the King, Richard Whiting, the Abbot of Glastonbury in Somerset, which was then the richest abbey in the kingdom, sent him a gift. The gift was a pie that contained the title deeds to twelve manor houses, and the person entrusted with delivering this gift to the King was Thomas Horner, the abbot's steward. On his way to London, Thomas Horner stole one of the deeds and soon after the Dissolution, the Manor of Mells became the residence of Thomas Horner, whose descendants lived there until 1975. The common name for someone who was a rogue or a knave was then, (and is still now), Jack! The idea of carrying such important items in a pie was not as silly as it may seem, for in those days the countryside was rife with highwaymen and common thieves. In order to disguise their valuables, travellers used many different and ingenious ways of hiding them including sewing them to the inside of their clothes and putting them in pies.