



Tawdry Knickers and Other Unfortunate Ways to Be Remembered: A Saucy and Spirited History of Ninety Notorious Namesakes

Alex Novak

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Some are born notorious.

Others have notoriety thrust upon them.

Few realize that their morning mouthwash bears the name of a life- saving British baron or that their sugary graham crackers would be abhorred by the health-food fanatic who concocted the flavorless original recipe. Throughout history, the proper names of figures both noble and notorious have slipped into the common and uncommon corners of our vocabulary. *Tawdry Knickers and Other Unfortunate Ways to Be Remembered* details the lamentable lives and legacies of history's most infamous namesakes and the words they inspired:

*Henry Shrapnel died of natural causes, despite having invented the shells whose shattering fragments would rain hellfire on soldiers from the Battle of Waterloo through the Vietnam War.

*Poor virgin St. Audrey suffered from a bulging neck tumor and the unwanted advances of an unsympathetic husband, but never lived to hear crass vendors eventually hawk her "tawdry" lace.

*If New York blueblood Harmen Knickerbocker isn't rolling over in his grave, his nineteenth-century drawers are at least in a twist over having his venerable family name associated with underwear.

*Barbara Handler has never been happy about providing the name for the original Barbie, to say nothing of her doll's plastic relationship with Ken-named for her real-life brother.

*In contrast to these, dynamite inventor Alfred Nobel avoided the inevitable "merchant of death" epitaph awaiting him by using his enormous explosives fortune to establish the Nobel Prize Foundation.

Want to know where your words come from? The surprising, humorous, and often ironic stories behind ninety notable eponyms will take you on an undercover tour of the etymological sausage factory.

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