# Newton

1642 - 1727

Isaac Newton was probably the greatest mathematician Britain has ever produced, though it took people a long time to realise this. He didn’t try hard at school and spent most of his time making complicated wooden toys. At the age of 12 he made a kite that could fly while carrying a lantern inside. He flew it at nighttime over his village in Lincolnshire, and terrified all the people there. They thought that it was a comet coming to destroy their homes.

Like all geniuses, Isaac did some daft things. He invented the cat flap for his pet cat. When the cat had some kittens he made lots of small cat flaps – one for each kitten. Then he couldn’t work out why the kittens just went through one cat flap! Also, on windy days he would stand in a field and jump up and down to see how far the wind would carry him. Mad.

One day the school bully was picking on Isaac (who was rather weedy). Newton lost his temper and flattened the child. His teacher (who was secretly rather pleased) challenged Newton to beat him at work too. Isaac rose to the challenge and became so good that he ended up at Cambridge University. Eventually he started teaching at the University and that should have been the end of the story.

But it isn’t! In 1665 the Bubonic Plague swept across Britain and Newton had to go home to Lincolnshire. He became very bored (This is understandable – I know as I used to live there) and when one day an apple fell on his head it prompted him to think about wacky mathematical ideas. After discovering gravity, Isaac went on to invent the laws of motion, calculus and the rules of colours and light. Without his discoveries we would not have aeroplanes, cars, bridges, skyscrapers, fruit pie and many other things.