

## Ig-Nobel

Recently, the annual “Ig-Nobel” awards have been announced. Unlike the “Nobel” ceremony, the prizes are given for such things as pointless research, madcap inventions and experiments that could not - *or should not* - be reproduced. Previous winners have included a man who invented an electronic teenager repellent; a group of scientist that catalogued the smells given off (under stress) by 131 species of frogs...and the people who invented a process to help overcome the difficulties of childbirth. This process utilises centrifugal force – the patient is spread-eagled on a table, which then revolves at high speed. Perhaps not *too* carefully thought through – but I’m sure they meant well.

Among those honoured this year, were the researchers who discovered that rats can’t distinguish between Japanese and Dutch (when both are played backwards), and the group which found that “Viagra” was an effective antidote for jetlag.... *in hamsters*. I never realised they were keen on long-haul flights.

The Ig-Nobel awards are in the tradition of organisations which celebrate the eccentric, heroic failures of mankind. One of the earliest, was Stephen Pile’s “Not Terribly Good Club”. Membership was restricted to those who could demonstrate prodigious incompetence in their chosen field, and were willing to lecture on subjects they knew nothing about. Pile himself was dismissed as President, after a book he wrote on failure became a literary success. The club itself was disbanded shortly afterwards, as Pile’s book generated 30,000 applications for membership...thus making it one of the most successful clubs ever.

Pile’s inspiration (in part) was a robbery at the Rothesay branch of the Bank of Scotland, in 1975. After meticulous planning, three robbers burst into the bank – only to become hopelessly stuck in the revolving doors. They had to be released by bank staff. They left with as much dignity as they could muster - only to return 5 minutes later, when they’d regained their composure. Despite announcing their intention to rob the bank, the staff were unable to take them seriously after the revolving door fiasco. One demanded £5,000 from the head cashier – who became incapacitated by laughter. Incensed, the robber jumped over the counter – landed badly – and writhed on the floor, clutching his ankle. This finished off the cashier, who also slumped to the floor – laughing uncontrollably. The other two robbers panicked and fled....only to get stuck in the revolving doors again.

Of course, I like to think that Jesus started the *first* club for heroic failures. He got himself 12 founder members, none of whom should have been allowed out without a responsible adult. Peter was the pick of a bunch – he couldn’t see a wrong conclusion without jumping to it...and his mates were little better. Despite spending 3 years with Christ, they were nearly as clueless by the time of the crucifixion as when they had started. *But*...after Pentecost, they went on to great things. True, they weren’t cured – Peter later got into trouble with the Apostle Paul over yet another dumb idea he had – but they served God well.

Personally, I’m glad Jesus picked guys like that – it shows that *anybody* can serve God. *His* club, though, is about making people successful in ways that actually matter...not about celebrating their failures. We’re not fussy at the Croes-y-Parc branch – we’ll even welcome people who are competent!