

Brexit, Typewriter's Patent, and Beyond: Why June 23 Stands Out in History

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On June 23, 2016, voters in the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union in a referendum that quickly became one of the most consequential political decisions of the early 21st century. The result, widely known as Brexit, reshaped British politics, altered the EU's future, and raised broader questions about national sovereignty, economic integration, migration, and democratic decision-making. It mattered immediately because it unsettled financial markets, brought down a prime minister, and opened years of negotiation. It still matters today because its effects continue to shape trade, diplomacy, identity, and the relationship between states and supranational institutions.

Long before that modern turning point, June 23 had already become a date marked by major political and military change. In 1314, the Battle of Bannockburn in Scotland reached its decisive phase as the forces of Robert the Bruce defeated the English army of Edward II. The battle did not end Anglo-Scottish conflict, but it became a lasting symbol of Scottish resistance and played a major role in securing Scotland's independence during the First War of Scottish Independence. Its importance lay not only in the military result but also in the way it strengthened the authority of Robert the Bruce and shaped later Scottish national memory.

More than four centuries later, another battle on this date had world-changing consequences. In 1757, the Battle of Plassey took place in Bengal, in present-day India. Forces of the British East India Company under Robert Clive defeated the army of Siraj ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, with crucial help from local allies and internal betrayal within the Nawab's ranks. Although the battle itself was relatively brief, its outcome was enormous. It gave the Company decisive influence in Bengal, one of the wealthiest regions in South Asia, and marked a key step in the expansion of British power in India. Over time, that commercial foothold grew into imperial rule, affecting the political, economic, and social history of the subcontinent for generations.

In 1868, Christopher Latham Sholes received a patent for the typewriter, an invention closely associated with the spread of modern office work, publishing, and business communication. Writing machines had been attempted before, but the typewriter helped standardize and speed up written correspondence in a way handwriting could not. It changed clerical labor, widened opportunities in office employment, and influenced how information moved through governments, companies, and newsrooms. Even in the digital age, its legacy survives in keyboard layouts still used on computers and phones.

By the late 19th century, June 23 also became linked to international sport. In 1894, delegates meeting in Paris formed the International Olympic Committee, following proposals strongly backed by Pierre de Coubertin. That step led directly to the revival of the Olympic Games in their modern form. The modern Olympics were shaped by both idealism and the realities of international rivalry, but they created a lasting global institution. Over time, the Games became a platform for athletic achievement, cultural exchange, and, at times, political symbolism.

The 20th century brought both war and innovation to this date. In 1940, Adolf Hitler visited Paris after France's defeat in the early months of the Second World War. The visit was brief, but it carried heavy symbolic weight. Nazi Germany had conquered much of Western Europe with startling speed, and the occupation of Paris showed how dramatically the balance of power had shifted. For people living through the war, the moment represented the reach of German military dominance. In later memory, it stands

as part of the larger story of occupation, resistance, collaboration, and eventual liberation.

Just a few years later, on June 23, 1947, the United States Senate passed the Taft-Hartley Act over President Harry Truman's veto. The law reshaped labor relations by limiting certain union activities and allowing states to pass "right-to-work" laws. Supporters argued it restored balance between labor and management after a wave of strikes; opponents saw it as a major setback for organized labor. Its significance has endured because it helped define the legal framework for union power and workplace politics in the United States for decades.

A very different kind of milestone came in 1961, when the Antarctic Treaty entered into force. Signed by countries active in Antarctic research during the Cold War, the treaty set aside the continent for peaceful purposes and scientific cooperation. It prohibited military activity there and paused territorial disputes without resolving them. At a time of global rivalry, that agreement showed that states with competing interests could still cooperate in a remote but strategically and scientifically important region. It remains one of the central foundations of Antarctic governance.

The date has also seen memorable moments in culture and media. In 1996, Nintendo released the Nintendo 64 in Japan, introducing a console that became a major part of late-1990s gaming culture. With its emphasis on 3D gameplay and titles such as Super Mario 64, it helped shape the design of video games at a time when the medium was expanding rapidly in technical ambition and commercial reach. The gaming industry was already global by then, and hardware launches like this influenced entertainment, design, and the growth of interactive media.

Then came the Brexit referendum in 2016, a decision rooted in long-running British debates about Europe, lawmaking, borders, and economic policy. The Leave vote did not settle those questions so much as bring them into a new and more difficult phase. Britain spent years negotiating the terms of departure, while the European Union faced renewed discussion about unity, reform, and public trust. The referendum's legacy lies partly in its immediate consequences, but also in the broader lesson that institutions built over decades can be reshaped quickly by a single national vote.

Among notable people born on June 23, several stand out across different fields. In 1894, King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom was born. His reign in 1936 lasted less than a year because he abdicated in order to marry Wallis Simpson, an American divorcée. The abdication crisis raised major constitutional questions and changed the line of succession, leading to the reign of his brother George VI and, eventually, the long reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

Alan Turing, born on this date in 1912, remains one of the most influential figures in modern science. His work in mathematics, logic, and codebreaking helped lay the foundations of computer science and artificial intelligence. During the Second World War, he played a central role in British efforts to break German encrypted communications. His ideas transformed computing, and his life has also become part of a wider history about scientific genius, state secrecy, and the treatment of gay men in the 20th century.

A different kind of global cultural influence came with Zinedine Zidane, born in 1972. The French footballer became one of the defining players of his era, known for skill, control, and success at the highest levels of the sport. He helped lead France to victory in the 1998 FIFA World Cup and the 2000 European Championship, later becoming a successful manager as well. Zidane's career made him a central figure in modern football history.

June 23 is also the birthday of Frances McDormand, born in 1957, whose work in film and theater has earned wide respect. Known for performances marked by precision and emotional depth, she has helped define a range of major American films across several decades. Her career reflects the lasting cultural influence of cinema and the role of strong character-driven acting in shaping audiences' understanding of everyday life.

This date is also associated with the deaths of several important figures. In 79 CE, the Roman emperor Vespasian died after restoring stability to the empire following a period of civil war. He is remembered for strengthening imperial finances and beginning the construction of the Colosseum, one of Rome's most enduring monuments.

Another major loss came in 1995 with the death of Jonas Salk, the American medical researcher whose work led to one of the first successful polio vaccines. Salk's achievement was a turning point in public health. Polio had once caused widespread fear around the world, especially among families with young children. The vaccine did not eliminate the disease on its own, but it dramatically reduced infections and became part of one of the great public-health efforts of the 20th century.

June 23 brings together battles that changed nations, inventions that altered daily work, treaties that preserved peace, and cultural milestones that reached millions of people.