

The True Story of Dick Whittington 1350-1423



Richard Whittington was born in 1350 in Gloucester. As son of a Lord, he was never truly poor. At the age of 13 his father died and Dick's older brother inherited the family fortune. Dick was sent to London to be an apprentice to a rich trader named John Fitzwarren. Later, Dick Whittington himself became the greatest merchant in medieval England. He was a mercer (a dealer in cloth). He exported wool all over the world. He supplied silk and velvet from China for the wedding dresses of the daughters of King Henry 4th.

He did become mayor of London 4 times, in 1397, 1398, 1407 & 1420 and he did marry Alice, his employer's daughter. There is no evidence that he ever had a cat, but it is true that London was infested with rats and many people did keep a cat! Rats were the cause of the "Black Death" in a few years earlier. (Of course, at the time, nobody realised that rats were to blame.)

In those days, Westminster and the City of London had separate governments. The Mayor of London was the head of Government for the City of London, and was based at the Guildhall. The mayor was a very powerful leader.

Richard Whittington died in March 1423. His wife had already died and they had no children. When he died, Dick Whittington left £5000 in his will to the poor people of London. This is probably why he is remembered. £5000 was a huge sum and would be worth several million pounds today. The money was used to build almshouses (homes for poor people), a college for young priests, and a library. His money also helped to rebuild Bart's Hospital and Newgate prison. His money was also used to improve London's water supply and even to build public toilets. In Highgate, there is a memorial featuring Dick Whittington and his cat. It is close to the Whittington Stone & Cat Public House and the Whittington Hospital.

Comprehension: **Answer in sentences:**

- 1) When and where was Dick Whittington born?
- 2) Dick Whittington was a mercer. What is a mercer?
- 3) How many times did Dick Whittington become Mayor of London?
- 4) What was his wife's name?
- 5) How many children did they have?
- 6) When did Dick Whittington die?
- 7) What was "The Black Death"?
- 8) How much did he leave in his will?
- 9) What are almshouses?
- 10) Where is there a memorial to Dick Whittington?