

Schott's Almanac of Belief

In the second of an occasional series exploring some of the more curious aspects of British life and society, **Ben Schott** has teamed up with Ipsos MORI to examine faith, belief and superstition.

GHOSTS

Do you believe in ghosts?

%	Y	N	?
All	38	57	5
Men	31	64	5
Women	44	49	7
Social class: ABC1	35	60	5
· C2DE	41	53	6
Read: tabloid	42	52	6
· broadsheet	33	63	4
Religion: Christian	41	53	6
· other	40	59	1
· none	30	65	5

36% of those who believe in ghosts say they have actually seen one.

ETs

Do you believe that some governments around the world are concealing evidence of extraterrestrial beings?

%	Y	N	?
All	31	60	9
Men	34	59	7
Women	28	61	11
Vote: Labour	34	57	9
· Conservative	30	63	7
Lib Dem	23	70	7
· other	32	64	4
Social class: ABC1	26	65	9
· C2DE	38	54	8
Read: tabloid	37	55	8
· broadsheet	21	72	7

(It was reported that former Roswell Airbase press officer Lieutenant Walter Haut, in a sworn affidavit opened after his death, said that the 'weather balloon claim' was a cover story for a crashed UFO carrying 'small humanoid extraterrestrials'.)

Do you believe that some crop circles are the work of extraterrestrial forces?

%	Y	N	?
All	9	84	7
Men	11	82	7
Women	7	85	8
Religion: Christian	7	84	9
· other	21	69	10
· none	9	87	4
Read: tabloid	10	81	9
· broadsheet	5	90	5
Ethnicity: white	7	85	8
· other	23	62	15

LUCKY CHARMS

Do you have something that you occasionally wear or carry around with you that brings you luck?

%	Y	N	?
All	16	84	0
Men	11	89	0
Women	22	78	0
Read horoscope	27	73	0

FOIBLES

Below are those who do or think something special if – when alone – they:

%	See a magpie	Break a mirror	Spill salt
All	26	7	22
Men	18	4	11
Women	34	10	33
Newspaper: tabloid	29	8	26
· broadsheet	21	6	20
Ethnicity: white	28	7	24
· other	12	4	6
Religion: Christian	30	8	27
· other	12	8	6
· none	23	5	18
Age: 16–34	31	5	14
· 35–54	31	9	24
· 55+	18	6	28
· 65+	20	7	31

Many cultures associate magpies with ill-fortune, possibly because of their destructive and thieving habits. A range of divinatory rhymes involve magpies, though most agree that a single magpie portends bad luck. The fear of spilling salt dates back at least to Roman times – and many still believe that misfortune may be averted by throwing a pinch of salt over the left shoulder with the right hand. Ominously, Leonardo's *Last Supper* appears to depict Judas as having knocked over a saltcellar by his elbow.

HOROSCOPES

Do you read your horoscope regularly (at least once a week)?

%	Y	N	?
All	23	77	0
Men	14	86	0
Women	31	69	0
Social class: ABC1	16	84	0
· C2DE	31	69	0
Read: tabloid	33	67	0
· broadsheet	10	90	0
Religion: Christian	27	73	0
· other	17	82	1
· none	14	86	0

Of all those who regularly read them, 27% believe that horoscopes 'accurately predict events' in their lives. 16% of regular horoscope readers change the way they behave towards people if they know star signs of those people – compared with 5% of non-regular horoscope readers.

SLEEP & BELIEF

% who would not be prepared to sleep in a room in which someone had died within the last month

%	All	Men	Women
28	20	35	29
35	28	31	25
26	50	41	25
18	32	21	21

% who believe that dreams can accurately predict the future

%	All	Men	Women
35	29	40	35
48	30	33	56
33	47	31	28
39	28	39	28

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,005 adults in Britain aged 16+. Interviews were conducted by telephone on October 5–7, 2007. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. BEN SCHOTT is the author of *Schott's Almanac*. www.benschott.com

HEAVEN & HELL

Most people (40%) believe in neither heaven nor hell. Optimistically, 16% believe in the former and not the latter. Below are those believing in:

%	heaven but not hell	hell but not heaven	neither	both heaven and hell
All	16	1	34	40
Men	9	1	31	52
Women	22	1	37	28
Age: 16–34	14	1	37	40
· 35–54	15	2	31	42
· 55+	18	1	34	36
· 65+	23	1	36	29
Christian	20	1	43	26
· other religion	10	3	41	39
· none	5	1	7	78
Ethnicity: white	16	1	32	41
· other	8	1	55	24
Read: tabloid	16	1	39	36
· broadsheet	15	1	28	47

13

Do you consider the number 13 to be unlucky?

%	Y	N	?
All	15	85	0
Men	12	88	0
Women	17	82	1
Religion: Christian	18	81	1
· other	5	95	0
· none	9	91	0
Read horoscope	28	71	1

GUARDIANS

Do you believe in guardian angels?

%	Y	N	?
All	38	57	5
Men	26	70	4
Women	50	44	6

DEATH

Below are those who believe in reincarnation; in life after death; that it is possible to receive communications from the dead:

% believing	All	Men	Women
23	47	32	21
42	22	42	31
30	47	30	26
19	49	26	32
46	46	32	29

FINGERS

Do you ever cross your fingers to bring good luck?

%	Y	N	?
All	39	60	1
Men	30	70	0
Women	48	51	1
Social class: ABC1	36	64	0
· C2DE	44	56	0
Religion: Christian	44	56	0
· other	28	72	0
· none	31	69	0
Read horoscope	62	38	0

Crossing one's fingers for luck may allude to making the sign of the cross. Some assert that 'touching wood' for luck refers to the wood of Christ's crucifix – though Pagans traditionally believed that certain trees (oak, hazel, ash &c.) were sacred, and had beneficial powers.

Do you ever literally 'touch wood' in order to avoid bad luck?

%	Y	N	?
All	51	48	1
Men	40	60	0
Women	62	38	0
Ethnicity: white	53	47	0
· other	33	66	1
Religion: Christian	56	44	0
· other	35	65	0
· none	44	55	1
Read horoscope	70	29	1

SCEPTICS

42% of those who claim *not* to be superstitious say that they still touch wood for good luck.

Say they are superstitious %	Claim not to be superstitious %
64	believe in ghosts 31
42	believe ET cover-up 28
14	believe ET & crop circles 7
38	carry lucky charm 10
55	believe in telepathy 37
76	believe in premonitions 53
82	believe we have souls 58
19	believe in fate 56
44	believe in witches &c. 11
44	visited fortune teller &c. 18
21	believe in spells &c. 10
55	have magpie foible 18
19	have mirror foible 4
49	have salt foible 15
50	read horoscope 15
45	not sleep room post-death 22
51	dreams predict future 30
40	believe 13 unlucky 8
59	guardian angels 33
37	believe in reincarnation 19
59	believe in life after death 44
59	can speak with dead 25
71	cross fingers for luck 30
82	touch wood for luck 42

(See each entry for full question wording)