

FEBRUARY



Al Capone (described on his business card as a second hand furniture dealer) settled a long running dispute with rival Chicago gangsters by organising the **St Valentine's Day Massacre** of 1929. Six members of Bugs Moran's gang and a bystander unfortunate enough to be at the scene were lined up and shot by four members of the Capone gang, two of them dressed as police officers. Described in the press as a gangland slaying, the episode forms the opening scene of Billy Wilder's 1959 comedy **Some Like It Hot**.



St Valentine's Day, 14 February, commemorates an early Christian martyr, described as ... "among those whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God." The current legends of St Valentine were invented by Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century, when the day became associated with



romance, to the subsequent delight of greeting card publishers and rose growers.

Benjamin Williams Leader's painting **February Fill Dyke** conforms to the popular view of the month as wet and miserable.



February also holds records for winds and cold. A temperature of -27.2°C , the lowest recorded in Britain, occurred in Braemar on 11 February 1895; while a British wind-speed record of 142mph was reached on 13 February 1989, also in Aberdeenshire.

Charles II, known as the Merry Monarch, died on 6 February 1685 "at the



end of several days of revelry with his concubines and favourite mistresses"...

... on the same date in 1952 the somewhat more family orientated **George VI** died aged 56, following several years of tobacco related lung problems.



In order to keep the calendar year synchronised with the astronomical year the Gregorian calendar, used in most of the world, adds a 29th day to February in 97 years out of every 400.

This is done by making every year that is divisible by 4 a **leap year** – unless the year is also divisible by 100.

A year divisible by 100 is only a leap year if it is also divisible by 400.

Simple, really.



A longstanding tradition encourages women to propose marriage on **29 February**; if the man rejects the proposal, he



should soften the blow by providing a kiss, £1 and a pair of gloves.

Tuesday 15 February 1971, **Decimal Day**, chosen because it was the quietest day of the year for banks, shops and transport, saw the end of the old coinage of threepenny bits, half crowns and tanners. Admission to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew leapt from its traditional cost of 1d to one new penny, an overnight increase of 240%. Entry now costs £12.25...

