International Colour Day

To celebrate International Colour Day on the 21st March, check out these eight extraordinary facts about colour, brought to you by Clive Gifford, author of *The Colours of History* (QED Publishing) the winner of Blue Peter's Best Book With Facts earlier this month.

Clive says, "There's a lot more to colour than meets the eye. Colours have signified allegiances, been traded as incredibly valuable commodities and built and brought down businesses and empires."

Clive can be found on Twitter at @CliveWrites

1. The rotting bodies of tiny murex molluscs soaked in urine produced Tyrian purple dye, highly-prized in the times of the Phoenicians, ancient Greeks and Romans. Around 250,000 of these shellfish produced just enough dye to colour a single Roman toga.

2. An entire war was fought in 1374 between the city-state of Basel and Austria over a single ship carrying saffron dye, which was stolen by pirates. The dye was highly valued as it took as many as 170,000 crocus flowers to make a kilo of dye.

3. Caput Mortuum or Mummy Brown was a rich brown pigment made from ground up ancient Egyptian mummies imported into Europe and mixed with white pitch and myrrh. It was used by a number of artists in the 18th and 19th centuries.

4. At the start of the 20th Century, 32 US states banned margarine from being dyed yellow to look like butter. Three states - New Hampshire, Vermont and South Dakota - all passed laws ordering all margarine to be dyed pink before it went on sale.

5. Bees' eyes are tuned to different spectrum wavelengths so they cannot see the colour red. In 2012, bees in northern France alarmed their keepers by producing blue and green honey – the result of the bees consuming waste M&M candy shells that were being processed near the town of Ribeauville.

6. Chromhidrosis is a rare condition where people emit coloured sweat. Caused by a build-up of lipofuscin deposits in the apocrine glands, the resulting sweat can be yellow, blue, green or pink.

7. Every St Patrick's Day in Chicago, around 11kg of orange-coloured powder is dropped into the Chicago river. This vegetable dye magically turns the entire river bright emerald or kelly green for the day.

8. After a study of almost 200,000 galaxies, astronomers at John Hopkins University stated that the average colour of the universe was "cosmic latte" – a beige-white.