

Solution for 5.4 Checkmate (Answer = WHITEMOUNTAIN)

The clue looks like that for a cryptic crossword, but, as the title of the crossword suggests, you also need to read well and be well read to solve the puzzle.

The first steps are to recast William as Bill, and to know the correct pronunciation of Horacek. When read out loud, the clue now sounds like:

Bill A. Horachecks fought but lost.

If you listen carefully to this, you can spot a play on sounds (rather than words) in the English language; splitting the phrase accordingly then gives:

Bill A. Hora - Czechs fought but lost.

Thus, using some usual and some unusual cryptic crossword techniques, it seems that you now have two clues: something that may or may not be a name, and a description of what seems to be a historical event. At this point, being well-read, finding somebody who is, or doing some searching for information about historical events involving one or more Czechs and a fight of some sort becomes necessary.

If you are also suspicious about the numbers chosen for the crossword entries, finding the answer becomes significantly easier: on 8 November, 1620, an event took place that led to the Czech people losing their freedom for almost 300 years. In less than two hours, on a small hillside outside Prague, the armies of the Protestant Bohemian Estates were defeated by the forces of the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic League. This battle is named after the hill on which the Bohemian armies were stationed. The Czech name of the hill is Bila Hora, and so the battle is known in English as the Battle of White Mountain. The clue, properly translated, therefore reads:

16, 20 Down: Bila Hora - Czechs fought but lost.