# SLANG THROUGH THE AGES

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Jonathon Green

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Slang through the ages.

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Jonathon Green

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to provide what might best be termed a history of slang by default. Curtailed as is inevitable in any but the most all-encompassing of lexicographical works by the imperatives of practical publishing, it is not, alas, a full history — such a tome would have run to at least three times the size —but within its pages there should still be a sufficiency of those central strands of the slang vocabulary, apostrophised some fifty years ago in the Edinburgh Review as 'sex, money and intoxicating liquor'. Indeed, it may even be felt that, along with the proliferation of bodily parts and functions, these entries tend overly much to emphasise the sordid, or to be kinder the racier side of life at the expense of the more quotidian, let alone the respectable. If such a criticism is to be levelled, then so be it. Such is the nature, and surely amongst the appeals of this particular lexical beast.

In all probability slang is as old as human speech. The character of slang — on the one hand its essential linguistic playfulness, and on the other its use as a 'secret' speech — makes it clear that as long as people have spoken formal 'standard' languages, so too have they created informal alternatives. In his Slang Dictionary (1866) John Camden Hotten mused on the potentially slangy 'bloods' of ancient Nineveh, while his successor Eric Partridge (in Slang Today and Yesterday [1933]) acknowledged the likelihood of slang's existence in the lost empires of China, Phoenicia and Central America, not to mention its well-documented appearance in classical Greece and Rome. But such vocabularies are finally no more than fragments: recorded English-language slang, with which I deal here, is a far more recent phenomenon.

The materials upon which I have drawn cover some four centuries of a developing, ever-diversifying vocabulary. The language, of course, is much older, but slang lexicography dates only to the 16th century and the appearance of Thomas Harman's Caveat for Common Cursetours (1565). Harman was not the first slang compiler – Robert Copland's The Hye Waye to the Spittel House (c.1537) and

the printer John Awdelay's Fraternitye of Vagabondes (1561) preceded him —but 'honest Harman' as Partridge named him, is the foremost of his period and remains, along with his successors Francis Grose, Hotten, John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley and of course Partridge himself, one of the masters of the genre.

What I have attempted is to take a variety of standard English words and phrases and look at the slang terminology that has grown up to parallel them. The areas on which I have concentrated are primarily concrete: typically parts of the body, sex and the 'sex industry', food, drink and drinking, men and women, money, crime; only occasionally, as in terms meaning goodness and excellence, have I strayed into the abstract. For all (or as many as possible) of the terms involved, I have attempted to trace an approximate earliest use (always debatable given slang's origins as a spoken rather than written language), the etymology and, perhaps most interestingly, the way in which a term is linked to others, especially earlier or later uses, and the way in which, to a sometimes surprising extent, slang survives.

As I stress above, there are unavoidable gaps. Drug terminology, for instance, is absent. Given the contemporary importance of such terms I particularly regret this, but would suggest in mitigation that much of the drug lexicon is jargon —the 'professional' slang of the user — rather than less specific general slang. Among other regretted absentees are the many terms that describe individuals — parasites and meddlers, cowards and heroes, the greedy and the generous and so on. Space, as ever, precluded unrestricted selection. I trust, nonetheless, that what does follow will both inform and entertain the many amateurs of slang, a lexicon that, however old its roots, remains the most persistently 'living' of languages.

Finally my thanks to all concerned with the production of this book, notably Kyle Cathie, Beverley Cousins and Jim Pope, and especially to Lucien Green, for his invaluable help on the index.

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

Among the oldest slang terms meaning man is cove, with its 18C feminine covess and its 19C diminutive covey (as used in Dickens' Oliver Twist). Given its alternative spelling of cofe, it is presumed that the word is identical with the contemporary Scots cofe: a chapman or pedlar. In turn it may, like a number of 16C cant terms, come from Romany, in this case wva or wvo, both meaning man. Whichever its origins, cove appears in a number of combinations, notably the cove of the dossing ken: the landlord of a lodging house, the cove of the ken: the master of the house, a crosscove\*: a robber, a kinchin-cove\*: a little man or a child brought up as a thief; a flogging-cove: a beadle, a smacking-cove\*: a coachman; a topping-cove\* or nubbing cove\*: a hangman; an abram-cove\*: a beggar, a queer-cove: a rogue, a gentry-cove: a gentleman, a downy-cove: a shrewd man and a rum cove which, given the shift in meaning of rum\*, moved from the 17C great, i.e. successful, rogue, to the 19C odd character. The 17C cuffin is a variation on cove. The image of man as consumer lies behind customer (which still survives in such combinations as ugly customer and queer customer and merchant, typically as meat-merchant\* or petticoat-merchant\*. A shaver was literally one who shaves, and has thus reached manhood, although the term remains best known as part of young shaver (usually referring to a younger person), while a gaffer, properly the abbrev. of granfer or grandfather, came to mean husband in the 18C and boss or master a century later. The female equivalent is gammer (fr. grandmother).

The 17C cull or cully, typically found in cramping cull\* or cross-biting cully\*, initially meant a constable, but was soon extended to meaning a man. especially a foolish one. The latter definition leads to claims that the term is linked to the Italian coglione: a dolt, but as plain man it may well come from the Spanish Gypsy chulai or Turkish Gypsy khulai, both meaning man or possibly

from the French *couillon*: testicles; certainly **culls** meant testicles. The 17C also offers **Johnnie** (its descendent **John** emerged in the 19C), **cock**, which also meant a plucky fighter, **damber**, which possible abbreviated **damme-boy** (cf. **roaring boy**) and **party**, still found in **old party**, and the basis of such legal terms as the guilty party, and being a party to. **Bugger**, coined in the 16C as SE for sodomite, joined the general terms for man by the 18C. Its contemporaries included **fish** (especially in **odd fish** or **queer fish**), **gloak** (18C, see THIEF for etymology) and the ever-popular **chap**, an abbreviation of the 16C *chapman*: a customer and as such relates to **cove**. However an alternative etymology links it to the Romany *chavo* or *chavi*: a child, and thus places it as the antecedent of the 19C **kiddy**, which also meant a small-time, if flashy, thief or pimp.

The 19C brings bloke, either from Shelta (cf. gloak) or from Romany. In either case the term seems based in the Hindi loke: a man although there is also a case for the Dutch blok: a fool (thus blockhead). Other extant 19C terms are joker, cuss (originally US; either from customer or possibly from cuss: curse), dude (coined in New York c.1883; either from duds\*: clothing, or an abbreviation of attitude) and geezer (1885) for which the OED claims origins in the dialect pronunciation of the 15C guiser, a mummer; but Partridge wonders whether Wellington's troops might not have picked it up from the Basque giza: a man, during the Peninsula War. Moosh or mush meant first mouth, then face and finally man; both come from the Romany moosh: a man. Less well-known today are kivey (presumably a diminutive of cove, though possibly linked to the Latin avis: a citizen), the backslang nam (19C, cf. namesclop\*: policeman), omee, omer, omey, homey and homee (all Parlyaree) and homo (lingua franca). Put had meant a rustic in the 17C (especially as a country put) and file a pickpocket in the 18C. Finally wallah, imported from India by British servicemen. Despite its almost invariable translation as man, and its common use as such, wallah is in fact a suffix, the Hindi wala: pertaining to or connected with, and comes in turn from the Arabic wali: proximity. It is the equivalent, therefore, of the Latin -arius. Although found today as a single term, its 19C uses

tended to be in combinations: Agra wallah: a native of Agra, banghy-wallah: a porter who carries loads with a banghy or shoulder-yoke, howdah-wallah, an elephant accustomed to carry a howdah, and the Anglo-Indian competition wallah: those who entered the Civil Service competitive exams, established in 1856 to replace the old system of personal patronage.

Regular Joe, sport, artist (another term more commonly found in combinations, e.g. piss artist\*: a drunkard) and the rhyming slang ice cream freezer (geezer) are all 20C, as are the Spanish imports hombre, known since the 19C as a Spanish term but adopted more recently as part of the popularity of Hollywood Westerns, and bozo, with an overtone of clownishness; the Spanish term means the light beard of adolescence, known in slang as bumfluff. One last combination seems to have proved itself impervious to chronology. Phrases based on 'old' begin with Shakespeare and nearly all are still in use. Old lad, more usually associated with the late Tony Hancock, can be found in Shakespeare in 1588, as can old boy (although the association with specifically old men does not arrive until 19C). Other such terms include old cock (18C); old top, old man, old chap, old horse, and old fellow (all 19C); old bastard, old bean, old egg, old socks and old sport (all 20C).

#### THE IMPORTANT MAN

If 'old' creates the most combinations in the realm of the general, the big, logically, plays a similar role in denoting the important man. The first such term is the 18C big wig (fr. the hairpiece), followed by the big cheese (19C, see GOOD for etymology) and thus the stilton; more 19C variations are big gun or great gun, big bug (fr. 18C bug: an important fellow), big people, big pot (originally referring to Oxford University dons), the big dog of the tanyard or the big dog with the brass collar (especially in a business context) and the biggest toad in the puddle. The 20C has a big deal (although it is more usually found as a deflatory response to some supposedly dramatic statement), a big fish (fr. fish: a fellow), the big chief or big white chief, big noise, big stuff (originally

describing World War I artillery shells), biggie and BMOC (US college use: big man on campus). Mr. Big, big shot and big wheel all came from 1930s gangland (or from the journalists who reported it), while a big enchilada (fr. Spanish enchilar: to season with chili and thus a tortilla served with a chili sauce) appeared during the Watergate scandal, c.1974; its origins, presumably, lie in big cheese.

Amongst other terms are topper (18C) and a number from the 19C: gaffer and governor or guvnor (both meaning the boss, although governor could also mean one's father), stunner (anyone expert in their own skill), cock of the walk, head cook and bottle-washer, high-up and his nibs (fr. nib: a gentleman or nibs: a well-dressed workman). The US high mucky-muck or high monkey-monk probably came from the Chinook jargon hiu muckamuck: literally plenty food, denoting a powerful member of a tribe; pooh-bah originated in Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Opera The Mikado (1885) in which 'Ko-Ko' is 'Lord High Executioner of Titipu' and 'Poo-Ba' is 'Lord High Everything Else'. Another US term sachem means specifically a political leader and comes from the Algonquin Indian name for a supreme chief. A nob (originally meaning head) gave the Nob's House: the House of Parliament and the Nob's Nob: King George IV. The nob was a less ostentatious version of the swell, their differences defined thus in Jon Bee's Dictionary (1823): 'the swell...makes a show of his finery...the nob, relying upon intrinsic worth, or bona fide property, or intellectual ability, is clad in plain-ness.'

Aside from the various terms based on 'big', the 20C has celeb (abbrev. celebrity) and headliner (both from show business) and heavyweight (fr. sport). Honcho (fr. the Japanese han'cho: a group leader) came back with the US forces from the Korean War while hot-shot dates back to the 17C, when a hot-shot was one who discharged his firearm too enthusiastically; parallel terms were to be a hot-shot indeed, or to be a hot shot in a mustard-pot (when both heels stand right up); all such terms carry a degree of sexual innuendo; all are essentially dismissive). Yiddish gives a mensch (fr. the German mensch: a person), a term that emphasises character as much if not more than it does any practical achievement, as well as shtarka (fr. the German stark: strong), for whom

menace and aggression are the main attributes. The men in suits are senior managers, although the term tends to mean money-men rather than their creative (and perhaps more excitingly dressed) peers, as well as a political use: the senior members of the Conservative party who traditionally 'take the soundings' of party opinion, Another term rooted in politics, this time American, is kingfish, originally the nickname of Senator Huey P Long of Louisiana the epitome of the populist orator come to power. H. G. Wells called him 'A Winston Churchill who has never been at Harrow', a New Orleans paper preferred 'The Prince of Piffle' and everyone else opted for 'demagogue', but Huey Long called himself 'The Kingfish', a term in which he revelled until his assassination, aged 38, in 1935. Australian rhy. sl. gives pitch and toss (the boss), while top dog and top cat and gorilla continue the animal motif.

Main man is originally Afro-American, as are Boss Charlie (from Mr Charlie: a white man) and a hammer man (either from 19C hammer: a strong puncher, or 20C hammer: penis). Finally the man gains his exclusiveness from the definite article; given the context the term can also mean a drug dealer or a policeman.

#### THE PROMISCUOUS MAN

The promiscuous man, or the whoremonger as he has been characterised since the early 16C, has attracted a wide range of slang for what are still considered as his enviable attainments. The monger (fr. Latin mango: a dealer or trafficker) element of the term gives mutton-monger (16C, from mutton: a prostitute or the vagina), fishmonger (17C, from fish: vagina or prostitute) and fleshmonger (17C, also meaning whore), and meat-monger (18C, from meat: vagina). Lusty-guts is 16C as is lusty lawrence (possibly punning on lazy Lawrence: the epitome of laziness; based on the probably apocryphal tale of the martyred St Lawrence who refused to make a sound as he was roasted to death, causing his executioner to suggest that far from being stoic, he was too lazy to move). On a more general level the 17C has bull or town bull and cavaulter (both bull and cavault mean to copulate), jumbler (cf. jumble-giblets\*), knocker, beard-splitter, beard-jammer, quim-

sticker and rump-splitter (all meaning the penis) and thrumster (fr. thrum: to thrash). The 18C introduces bum-faker, bum-tickler, bum-ranger, bum-worker and bum-fighter, gapstopper, leather-stretcher (also meaning penis; fr. leather: the vagina) and leglifter (fr. lift the leg: to copulate). The fecund 19C adds many new terms. The world of nature has bird of the game and cock of the game, (19C) (although SE cock of the game means the champion), bird's-nester (doubly punning on bird: woman and nest: vagina), gamecock and cock-fighter (both drawn from the cock-pit), goat, horseman (who 'rides'), muttoner (cf. muttonmonger) and ling-grappler (fr. ling\*: vagina). A carrionhunter refers to carrion: body although the 18C use meant an undertaker. The respective male and female genitals give ballocks (a slang term by the 19C, but SE from the 11C), Bluebeard (also the penis), prick-scourer, button-hole worker (fr. buttonhole: vagina), striker and tummy tickler (cf. tummy banana). Sexual excitement counts for hot member, hot 'un, warm member (all of which can apply to either sex), rattle-cap, (fr. have a rattle: to copulate), sharpshooter and rifle-man (who 'shoot') and scorcher. Chauvering-cove and chauverer come from charver: to copulate, fuckster is bluntly self-explanatory, while performer and servant (one who 'services') are euphemistic, as is the high priest of Paphos (see PROSTITUTION for etymology). Mormon and Solomon both refer to the multiplicity of wives permitted both to the religious cult and the Biblical monarch, Mr Horner puns on whore, a petticoat merchant trades in females while a smell-smock is based on smock: an immoral woman. The sportsman plays his own sort of game while a Corinthian (which would also come to mean an idealised form of sportsman, this time in the field rather than the bedroom) comes from the 17C term meaning 'elegant dissipation'. The term was widely popularised with the publication in 1821 of Pierce Egan's Life in London; the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorne and his Elegant Friend, Corinthian Tom, the original Tom and Jerry and thus fathers to the eponymous Warner Bros. cartoon and the male leads of the television series The Good Life. Other 19C figures include the grouser, john among the maids, molrower (which also

means to caterwaul and thus compares the whoremonger's seductions to the howling of amatory cats), the **belly-bumper** (a back formation of **get a belly-bumper**: to be made pregnant), the **king of clubs** (fr. **club**: penis) and the **ladies' tailor** (fr. the in-and-out 'sewing' motion of intercourse; cf. **needle**, **needle-woman** and **sew**). A **billy-noodle** (US 19C, Aus 20C) is not a real ladies' man, but firmly believes, evidence notwithstanding, that no woman can resist his charms.

The equation of the penis and its user continues into the 20C with such terms as stickman, swordsman, cocksman and cockhound while the animal kingdom gives stallion, stud (fr. stallion at stud; an available mistress can be a **stud mare**), **wolf** (presumably from the Big Bad Wolf), rooster and alligator (both Afro-American). Other terms include fast worker, heaver (AA), makeout artist, saloon-bar cowboy, come-freak or cum-freak (both from come or cum: semen or ejaculation) and swinger, which has a secondary meaning as being a fan of what, in the 1970s was more usually known as 'wife-swapping'. US teenagers profess themselves members of the 4-F club: 'find 'em, feel 'em, fuck 'em and forget 'em'. While most studs are omnivorous, some tie themselves to specific parts of the female body: the fat-fancier (19C), fat-monger (19C) and figure-fancier (19C, from figure: large) all prefer what the retail trade calls the 'fuller figure', as does the 20C chubby-chaser. The modern arse man, leg man and tit man should need no amplification. Last of all is the man who is no better than he should be and who, in his successful career has had more arse than a toilet seat.

## WOMEN

Writing in *Womanwords* (1989), her invaluable lexicon of terms used to describe women, the majority of which have been coined in a less than complimentary manner by men, Jane Mills notes that so substantial is the slang vocabulary, especially that which equates

'woman' with 'slut' or its synonyms, that she 'had to draw an arbitrary line lest [the book] turned into a dictionary of slang.' As these entries bear out, her findings are all too accurate. Women fare less than well. Slang is the essence of 'man-made language', created by man and largely spoken by him too. Thus it has been, still is, and shows every sign of remaining.

#### WOMAN AS A SEX OBJECT

Of the various slang terms for woman a large number, no doubt unsurprisingly, see the woman as no more than a sex object and as such derive purely and simply from terms that otherwise mean the vagina. For the relevant etymologies the reader should look under Vagina. Alternatively, the sex, as it were, is muted and the object takes centre stage. This construction lies behind one of the oldest such terms, piece, which entered the language during the 14C, and remained SE for the next three to four hundred years, after which, in such combinations as piece of stuff (17C), piece of ass\*, piece of tail\* and piece of stray (all 20C), it became a staple of such dismissive descriptions. Parallel terms head by a bit of... took up a similar role from the 19C onwards. Additional 'bits' include a bit of muslin (19C), a bit of ebony (a black girl) and a bit of crackling (a mix of cracker, crack: vagina, and roast pork skin). Most 'bits' implied an attractive woman, although a bit of mutton or a piece of mutton (fr. mutton: vagina or prostitute. especially as in laced mutton\*) implied in this context a woman dressing younger than her years. As well as the well-known mutton dressed as lamb, such a supposedly anachronistic figure was also known as a peg puff, a phizgig (possibly related to its alternative definition: a pile of moistened gunpowder which when lit fails to flash) and a mutton cove.

Other early description include pussy (17C), flat-cock (18C), gusset and placket (both 17C), all of which are purely anatomical. However the point of view was not wholly masculine: gobble-prick (18C a 'rampant, lustful' woman, Grose), staff breaker and staff climber (19C, from staff of life: penis), were somewhat back-handed compliments, but did admit to some degree of female

sexuality. The 19C added fish and oyster (both nodding to the vagina as fish metaphor) plus fluff (fr. fluff: pubic hair). The 20C tuna provides another 'fish' image.

More recent terms, all of which equate vagina with woman include the Afro-American booty and butter (both from butt: posterior), cock (usually found as the masculine penis, but meaning vagina in the Caribbean and the Southern States of the US; possibly from 17C cockles: labia minora), coño (fr. Spanish), cookie, coot and cooze (all euphemisms of cunt\*, crack, crotch, gash (as simple anatomy 18C, but the derogatory use is 20C and possibly comes fr. gash: spare, waste), quiff, slit, snatch, hair (thus get one's hair cut: to visit a woman for sex), kitty-cat (cf. pussy) and minge bag (fr. minge\*). Finally, definitively, comes cunt\* itself.

#### THE PROMISCUOUS WOMAN

Given the nature of this area of slang, the line between a 'neutral' woman and one who is deemed promiscuous is at times almost invisible. The terms that follow, some of which overlap with other sections, may be presumed to have a higher 'promiscuity' content than their peers. Readers should check PROSTITUTION for cognate vocabulary. Virtually all are 20C coinages, although on occasion their origins may lie somewhat earlier.

Of all the various 20C terms one stands out above all: bimbo, with its less common abbreviation bim, has become (and to a great extent remains) the ultimate description of a certain type of contemporary young woman. Such a figure is often seen as something of a gold-digger (her 1930s equivalent) and indulged as such by rich and/or powerful older men and the media to whom she tells or sells her tale. The earliest use of bimbo is found c.1900 in America, where it was synonymous with bozo to mean a tough guy. A parallel use was that to mean 'baby', abbreviated from the Italian bambino. By the 1920s the word meant young woman, often a prostitute. The current use stems from the revelations of a 'model', of her relationship with a millionaire businessman. Bimbos may also be masculine, and as such are synonymous with the slightly

older toyboy, the modern synonym for the older gigolo\*. Another masculine synonym is himbo.

A number of terms simply equate sexually active women with dirt: thus dirty leg, dirt-bag and shagbag (fr. shag\*), grubber, scab, scuzz, sleaze, snot (19C, usually nasal mucus, although 19C Scots cant defined snot as 'a gentleman'), sweat hog, pig, scrubber (a military coinage of the 1920s, but obviously linked to the 18C scrub: a cheap whore; cf. scrubbing brush\*), slag (fr. SE slack; its earlier, 18C use meant coward; Robin Cook's novel The Crust On Its Uppers [1962] defines the slag as 'young third-rate grafters, male or female, unwashed, useless') and whore (but with no commercial overtones) itself. Predictable, easy availability underlines dead cert, lay, easy lay or easy ride, free for all, gin-and-fuck-it (pun on gin-and-tonic), pushover and the cognate Little Miss Roundheels (cf. 19C lift the heels: to copulate), quickie, right sort (also 19C: gin), motorcycle (AA), town bicycle, town pump, town punch and bike, while a carpenter's dream is 'flat as a board and easy to screw'. Paraffin lamp is rhy. sl. for tramp and its cognate bum. Knock and leg both come from earlier terms meaning sexual intercourse, respectively knock (16C) and leg business (19C); goer (orig. 19C racing use: a good runner), hot-bot (cf. 17C hot-arsed, hot-backed), screamer and creamer, lust dog, nympho and nymph (both from SE nymphomaniac; cf. 18C nymph of darkness, nymph of delight: a prostitute) all suggest an insatiable woman; a shack job. shack-up or sleepy-time girl are good for a brief relationship. The floosie or floozie comes from the dial. floosy: flossy, thus soft, while punch originates in the 18C SE verb punch: to pierce. Broad (possibly from a woman's physique, though most contexts ignore such a possibility) remains primarily US, while the sexually generous charity girl and chippie usually mean prostitute.

Parasites include the **groupie** or **band rat** and the **snow bunny** (specialising respectively in rock groups and skiers); a **splash** is a victim of gang rape, while a **buttered bun** (**butter**: semen, **buns**: buttocks) is one who has sex with several men in succession. The term was first coined to describe the 16C courtesan Louise de Quérouaille; the current use dates from the 17C. The **Mayfair** 

Merc or Mayfair mercenary (coined as the somewhat tartier cousin of the Sloane Ranger) is one happy to use sex as a launchpad for social success. Finally, the girl who is 'no better than she should be' is one who has had more pricks than a second-hand dart-board.

#### ANIMALS AND FOOD

A less aggressive, but barely more complimentary group of terms position women as animals, or even food. Bitch had moved on from its 14C SE origins as meaning a female dog to becoming a prostitute by the 15C; that aspect vanished but the term has remained generally derogative since the 18C; bitch party is a synonym of hen party. Bird, still extant today, appeared a century ago; other birds include biddy which began life in the 16C meaning a chicken, became a young girl in the 18C and has meant any woman since the 19C; if anything the 20C meaning, often with the adjective 'old' has made the logical last leap and means an old woman. Hen is an early 17C term, while chick, a byword for the politically incorrect, is 20C, although it has been used as an affectionate description of a child since the Middle Ages, as has the synonymous chickabiddy, which was coined by London costermongers during the 19C. Quail, pheasant and plover all started life in the 17C, when they generally meant prostitute, but became generalised terms by the 19C; of the three quail is the survivor still widely used in the US - and the San Quentin quail is a synonym for jailbait, i.e. such a youngster can send a man to the San Quentin (or any other) prison. Poultry (19C) meant women in general and wool, like fluff, also means pubic hair while dish invariably implies good looks.

Like pussy, cat has a lengthy pedigree: whore in the 16C, argumentative termagent in the 19C and gossip since the 1920s. Mare is a 20C term, and like the similar moo gained wide currency during the successful 1960s' television series, Till Death Us Do Part. Either term is open to affectionate as well as derogatory use; cow (17C) may have begun life as a neutral term but its modern use is strictly negative. Filly is 17C, as is the male pursuit of filly-hunt-

ing, haybag (upon which one lies) is 19C, while fox is the current Afro-American term of approval. To move from animals to food, trout (18C) is another play on the 'fish' image, but originally trout = truth = honest, and thus implied the trustiness of the woman, rather than anything offensive. The jelly (19C) was a buxom and pretty girl, the cherry or cherry ripe (19C) and the cherry pie (20C) is a virgin; a potato (a term much beloved of Damon Runyon's fictional Broadway hustlers), is in fact Australian rhy. sl: potato peeler: sheila\*.

More recent 'food' terms include the Afro-American cookie (US: biscuit), banana (possibly for a 'yellow' girl), butter baby, poundcake (cf. eat poundcake\*), sweet potato pie, tootsie roll (fr. a well-known US sweet), and candy (a sexually desirable person of either sex; cf. sweetmeat). Cheesecake (while commonly used as a synonym for pinup or Page Three girl, is also a richer version of the commonplace tart); similar are creamie, crumpet, cupcake, dish, honey, jam (also meaning semen), pancake, peach, pie, sweetie (although this is generally the abbrev. of sweetheart), tomato and the all-encompassing yummy.

#### THE ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

Nowhere is the male-orientated dimension of this particular area of slang so prevalent than in the terms to describe attractive women or girls and, in the following section, those who are considered less physically favoured. A mix of lasciviousness and patronage infuses virtually every term. Once again some words overlap with more general uses, meaning simply 'woman'.

Among the most popular of today's terms is stunner or stunnah (as spelt by tabloid sub-editors). It is, in fact, a 19C coinage and can be found in *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green* (1853) by 'Cuthbert Bede' (the Rev. Edward Bradley 1827-89). The stunner's peer, the Page Three girl, is all 20C, an invention of the *Sun* newspaper of the late 1970s, which started featuring scantily clad pin-ups on page three. Other popular terms include lovely, dreamboat (equally common as a description of an attractive male), eyeful, glamour puss, charmer (usually as little charmer), classy chassis, and

cracker or little cracker. Slightly more exciting are scorcher, sexpot and hot number. America offers babe and real babe, cutes, cutesie-pie and cutie (plus cute chick\*), looker, nifty and nifty piece, patootie (possibly from potato\*), toots, little pretty and star. A ten is a girl who rates at ten out of ten on any scale of male appreciation, the term comes from the eponymously titled film of 1979, starring Bo Derek. Back in Britain doll\* is compounded as doll city, dollface and dolly, an angel was originally a prostitute working near the Angel public house in Islington; the talent is a general term for pretty girls, e.g. 'Any talent about?' Donah is virtually defunct, but was a classic 19C term, a Parlyaree word that came from the Italian donna: a woman, and is enshrined in the music hall couplet (usually attributed to Gus Elen): 'Never introduce your donah to a pal / For the odds is ten to one he nicks your gal.'

Australia adds beaut and grouse gear (both of which can simply mean good) and the surfers' ginch. Afro-American terms include poodle (an unusually complimentary twist on the negative dog\*), Porsche and Mercedes (both luxury motorcars), melted butter (a light-skinned girl), mink, brickhouse, fleshpot, hamma or hammer, sleek lady, thoroughbred black and the sexually paradoxical stallion (she gives a good ride?). Finally a Barbie Doll (fr. the trade-marked toy) is pretty but ultra-conventional and all tits and teeth describes a girl who is blatantly sexual, if less than notably bright.

#### THE UNATTRACTIVE WOMAN

Cow meant simply woman in the 18C, but acquired the image of prostitution in the 19C; modern uses tend to be as combinations—typically stupid cow, ugly cow and Nell Dunn's book title: Poor Cow. Crow comes from chromo, both of which can also mean whore (see PROSTITUTION for etymology); dog, dogface (also a soldier) and doggie are common US pejoratives, all of which are presumably rooted in the earlier bitch, although dog is a general negative, as often found in non-sexual contexts. Other terms include cull bird (possibly fr. 18C farming use, cull: an animal too

old for breeding), bat (often as old bat and originally, 18C, a prostitute), buzzard (an ignorant and gullible person since 14C), hedgehog, heifer (19C, cf. cow), hog (fr. 20C hog: to copulate) and mule (which can also mean an impotent male). Other putdowns include bad news, bag, double-bagger and douchebag (US; Aus. has Douche Can Alley: Palmer Street, the red light area of Sydney), drack (Aus., possibly from Dracula), hairbag, pitch and skank. Black America has its share: bear, chicken and thunder chicken represent the animal kingdom, while B.B. head, nailhead, ragmop and tackhead all equate ill-kempt or unfashionable hair with an unappetising person. A welfare mother extends the condemnation to poverty, while a skeeza (fr. skeeze: to have sex; beloved of rap\* lyricists) is not merely ugly but promiscuous with it. The acronym PTA stands for pussy, tits and armpits — all of which allegedly smell.

Finally a fat woman is variously a Bahama mama (AA, contrasting supposedly overweight West Indians with sleek US girls), a butterball, Judy with the big booty (AA; fr judy: a woman, and booty: the behind), a pig, pigger or pigmouth, a shuttle-butt, or a teddybear (AA); the 19C, slightly less cruel, opts for feather-bed and pillows.

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

Of general terms for women, mot or mort, blowse or blouse and gixie (16C) have also been stolen to mean prostitute and their etymologies can be consulted in the relevant section. The 17C blowen has had a similar treatment. Other 17C terms include apron (cf. apron squire\*), smock (cf. skirt) and cooler (fr. the assumption that passion cools after sex; cf wife in water colour\*). Like the generic smock, which can be used to mean woman in a variety of contexts, usually those injurious to her reputation, petticoat appears in a number of combinations: petticoat government (female rule in the home, a precursor of the 20C pussy-whipped), a petticoat merchant\* (a whoremonger), a squire of the petticoat (a pimp, cf. apple squire\*), and petticoat led (one who is infatuated). A gig is a flighty woman while

a crackish one (fr. crack: vagina) is a 'wanton'; a faggot is synonymous with a baggage\* (which has strong overtones of promiscuity): both are something to be borne or carried. The 18C borrows from Scots dialect to add dame and from the Latin for man -homo -to obtain homoney. Moll is yet another term that serves equally as whore, while a catamaran is a play on cat\*, or possibly puns on the 19C SE use of catamaran: a fireship\*). The suffix -widow, meaning any woman whose husband is occupied elsewhere, emerged in the 18C, typically as grass widow or widow bewitched; such combinations as golf widow or cricket widow are 20C coinages.

Doll, the ancestor of the 1960s dolly and dollybird appears in the mid-19C, while hairy ('a hatless slum girl in Glasgow') and its adverbial form hairy (sexually alluring) is a contemporary. Judy, possibly from Punch and Judy shows, appears c.1810; other 19C terms include mivvy (possibly from mivey: a landlady), polone (a Parlyaree term that echoes the older blowen\*), the generic skirt (often as in a bit of skirt), totty (fr. the proper name Dorothy or from titty\*; originally a high class whore, by the 20C it was used without pejorative overtones) and crumb or crummy (a pretty, plumpish woman; the term comes from the crumb of a risen loaf), sister and the great Australian feminine: sheila. Sheila, usually spelt shaler until c.1900, has no easy etymology. As a name it is all-purpose for an Irish girl, the female equivalent of paddy\*, which has come to mean any Irishman; both terms appear in that context in 19C Australia. Hotten suggests that it is the 'corrupt form of Gaelic, caille, a young woman.' The drift from Irish girl to any girl approximately parallels the shaler/sheila spelling change; by 1919 the writer W. H. Downing defines it simply as 'a girl' in his Digger Dialects.

Modern terms include babe, frail (now US, although the 'frail sisterhood' was used in the UK c.1830 to mean prostitutes. albeit classy ones) and jane (cf. judy, sheila), all primarily US and all still smacking of the pulp novels wherein they first saw the lexical light. More recent Americanisms are the Afro-American band (used in Aus. to mean a whore), rag baby, real woman and one good woman. The UK has tart (with its implication of promiscuity),

nammo or nemmo (both backslang), and the rhy. sl.twist (twist and twirl: girl) and cuddle and kiss (miss), sort (coined in Aus. c.1910 it appeared in the 'old country' thirty years later); the term was briefly popularised c.1970 as the invariable name of the girls who associated with skinhead boys. Mystery describes young girls who had run away to London; thus mystery mad or mystery punter: a man who specialises in the pursuit of such girls. Finally a party of women can be a fool's wedding (19C), a hen party (19C), bitch-party, cat-party or tabby-party.

## THE BODY

#### THE BODY IN GENERAL

Thomas Harman, composing in his Caveat (1567) a fictitious dialogue between a couple of villains as a means of illustrating the canting vocabulary, has the one greet the other: 'Bene Lightmans to thy quarromes...' and translates this as 'Good morrow to thy bodye...' Quarromes, sometimes found as quarroms, or quarron must thus stand as the earliest slang term for the body. It comes, like a number of cant terms, from Europe, in this case from the Italian carogna or the French charogne, both meaning flesh. Subsequent terms include bacon (used by Falstaff in I Henry IV [1596] when he urges 'On,! Bacons, on!', and is the basis for the phrase 'save one's bacon' and the rude gesture of pull bacon or longbacon - cocking a snook or thumbing one's nose), the 18C soul-case, which still survives in the modern Australian belt, worry or work the soul-case out of (to work to exhaustion), and apple-cart (although this is probably not the same conveyance found in 'upset the apple-cart'), and the 19th's bone-house. A single bone was known as a tot (fr. the German todt, meaning dead.) Modern terms include the abbreviated bod, the mechanistic chassis and, specifically applied to women viewed strictly as sex-objects: shaft. A pair of terms meaning skin reduce the human to his/her animal basics: hide and pelt.

#### THE HAIR

Hair offers two pieces of 19C rhy. sl.: fanny blair (which has not survived) and barnet fair (still extant, usually abbreviated to barnet; it is known as bonny fair in US), as well as the agricultural top dressing (19C), strommel (16C: straw), nob thatch (19C nob: head, thus strommel-faker and nob-thatcher: wig-maker), thatch and the Afro American righteous moss (moss originally meaning lead). Still in vegetable mode, red hair, logically, is carrots, as well as ginger and flames. Turnip-pated meant white-haired. A bald man was the Marquis of Granby, and his modern-day equivalent a skinhead or baldie. The potential problems of dirty hair are found in the 18C louse trap (a comb), lousewalk (a back hair parting) and louse bag (a wig or bag over the hair) as well as the louse ladder (1920 side whiskers). False hair was a tower (19C), a predecessor of today's rug or wool. Newgate, the bestknown City jail, from whence so many felons went to the gallows, was especially productive of hair-related terms. The Newgate knocker (19C) was a lock of hair shaped like the figure 6, and twisted from temple back towards ear; the grimmer aspects of the jail were further reflected in the Newgate ring and Newgate collar, respectively a moustache and beard worn as one without whiskers and a collar-like beard worn under chin, both of which were fancifully reminiscent of the hangman's noose.

Other popular hairstyles were the heartbreaker (16C, a curled love-lock), the aggerawator (a coster-monger speciality comprising a well greased lock of hair twisted and pointing either at the corner of an eye or at an ear), the meat-hook (another coster favourite and shaped as it would seem), the beau-catcher or bow catcher (19C, both equivalent to the modern kiss-curl), and love-curls (late 19C, hair cut short and worn low over forehead). Knockers, usually meaning breasts (qv), were small curls worn flat on the temples. Apart from the DA (UK: duck's arse) or duck tail (US) cuts beloved of the 1950s' Teddy Boys, rockers and greasers, and the skinhead and suedehead crops of their 1970s successors, the gaudiest of modern styles remains the punks' mo-

hican (whether plain or coloured). The term was by no means new in slang: coined c. 1960 for hair (though popularised in the late 1970s) and related to the Mohican Indians, or at least their Hollywood incarnation, a century earlier it indicated 'a very heavy man that rides a long way in an omnibus for sixpence'.

Apart from the two Newgate-generated phrases above, terms for facial hair —a beard or moustache —include stache and tash, face fungus, fungus, and face fins (all 20C), mouser (19C), also meaning the female pubic hair, as do muff (19C) and beaver (20C, especially as in the street game when children would compete to be the first to spot a bearded man and signify their success by shouting, 'Beaver!'). A bearded man was also a billy-goat (19C); one who needed a shave oyster-faced, and light adolescent fuzz merely bum-fluff.

#### THE HEAD

Logically enough the head, with its uppermost position on the body, takes its slang names from the heights, human and otherwise. Such terms include attic (1823, with its extension queer in the attic, meaning both mad and drunk arriving in 1870; craziness is also implicit in the 20C rats in the attic), cockloft (17C) and garret (18C), belfry (19C, in which of course one may be bats). Others include dome (19C UK, 20C mainly US), topknot, top piece (1830s), topflat, top end, top story and upper story, upper extremity, upper apartment and upper crust (all 19C), weathercock, gable (1870), and wig.

The essentially global shape of the head, plus the desire of slang coiners to relate it to a variety of edibles, lends itself to a second set of slang terms; readers of P. G. Wodehouse may find many of them familiar. Apart from crust and loaf (both rhy. sl.: crust / loaf of bread: head) and twopenny (loaf: loaf of bread: head), they include biscuit, crumpet (19C), scone (Aus.), bean (19C), coconut and its abbreviation coco (1830), turnip (19C; a popular bet was 'all one's head to a turnip') and swede (20C), onion (19C; an eccentric is 'offhis onion'), costard (16C, meaning a large apple as such the root of that prime user of Cockney slang, the costard

or coster-monger), and pumpkin (19C). Gourd also means pumpkin, as does calabash, a term based in the Levant, with roots in the Persian kharbuz, or kharbuza, meaning melon', and occasionally 'water-melon', from which came the Arabic khirbiz, melon, and kirbiz, pumpkin or gourd. Other linguistic links can be found in Spain, Sicily, Turkey, Albania, Greece and Serbia. Gourd further serves to mean the mind, as do thinker and upstairs. Nut and nutcracker (both 19C) imply the head in the context of violence, thus the verb to nut, meaning to use the head as a weapon.

Harman lists nab (as nabe) in 1567; nob follows a century later; its later use as a synonym for toff emerges c.1800. Noll (SE from 9C-18C, but henceforth slang) leads on to noddle (18C, but SE in 15C when it meant the back of the head), noodle, and nuddikin (19C; from noodle-ken).

Finally a random group: block (17C, extant only in 'knock one's block off'), boko (in 20C Australia a horse with only one eye), bonce (otherwise meaning a large marble), chump (1860), conk (more commonly nose, but head in Aus. since 1920), deache (backslang); pimple (thus pimple cover: hat), napper (18C, also meaning hat) and hat peg; poundrel (17C, the SE word means scales); canister, brainpan and knowledge box; lolly (19C), lob (mid-19C, originally a snuff-box), the punning Crown office, billiard ball (presumably of a bald person), holus bolus (19C), jolly (abbrev. for jolly nob); a last trio, sconce (16C), noggin (19C) and mazzard (fr SE mazer 16C) also meant a drinking cup.

#### THE FACE

The face is particularly susceptible to rhyming slang. Such terms include airs and graces (20C), roach and dace (1874), boat (1946, boat-race: face), chevy chase (1859), and Jem Mace (fr. the 19C prize-fighter). The jaw is similar creative, with jackdaw (1857) and rabbit's paw (1930, but more often rabbit\* means talk or speech, in which context jaw\* means to converse and dates to the mid-18C). Other terms include muns (17C, cf mun, below), whisker-bed, beezer (usually meaning nose, qv), clock (1870) and dial (1830), esaff (backsl.), kisser (1860) and smiler (20C);

frontage, frontispiece, map (20C), and signboard; mug (1708, possibly from the Toby-Jug-like mugs designed as grotesque faces), mush (fr. the skin's softness), pan (20C), phiz and phizog (fr. SE physiognomy), puss (often implying ugliness) and gills (thus 'green about the gills': looking poorly). A light complexion is furmity-faced (fr. frumenty: hulled wheat — Latin frumentum — boiled in milk), a broad face is a splatter face. Freckles are angel kisses.

The chin is variously the **button** (orig. prize-fighting jargon), and the rhy. sl. **Errol Flynn** or **Gunga Din**. The 19C **nutcracker** denoted a Mr Punch-like profile with a curving nose and protruding chin. Cosmetics, with which the face is adorned include **lippy** (20C, lipstick), **slap** (19C, theatrical) and **war paint** (20C).

#### THE MOUTH AND THROAT

The earliest recorded non-standard term for mouth is neb, otherwise meaning beak, which dates back to the Ancren Riwle, a devotional work composed c.1225. It was followed, c.1300, by mun or munn, a direct loan from the Norwegian dialect term for mouth, and 150 years later, by gob (still going strong, especially as in the dismissive phrase 'Shut your gob!'), possibly rooted in the Irish term meaning beak. The unconnected gan, possibly from the Scottish gane, is cited by Harman. Gans, the plural, means lips. By the 18C gab, another Scottish term, joined the lexicon, with its extension gob-box. Other general terms include moey (19C, fr. Romany mooi: mouth), trap (19C, usually as in another putdown: 'Shut your trap'). Further general terms include a quartet of rhy. sl.: East and South, sunny south, North and South and salmon and trout; mizzard (fr. mazzard: face), dubber (18C), mummer (fr. mun), rag-box (rag: tongue), bazoo (fr. the Dutch bazu(in): trumpet; cf. trumpeter: one who has bad breath). Specific terms include gig (1871, possibly fr. gibface meaning a heavy lower jaw and thus an ugly person), and two meaning a large mouth: oven (18C) and sparrow-mouth (19C, 'one whose mouth cannot be enlarged without removing the ears' Grose).

Other terms reflect the various functions of the mouth as a hole or passageway, as a container for the teeth, or as a means of eating,

speaking or kissing. Chops (18C), puss (see above at face) and muzzle all hark back to one's essential animality, while hole, gash (US, 1852), hatchway (1820), hopper (19C), and maw all underline the mouth's physical shape and purpose. The use of the mouth for speech can be seen in yap (with further animal overtones), blabber (16C, from blab\*), blubber (18C, also meaning breasts), chaffer (19C, from chaff: to banter with), chirper (19C), clacker and clack-box (19C), flapper (one 'flaps one's lips'), prater (fr. 15C SE, meaning talker) and prattler; respirator and lung-box point up its breathing role. Kisser and kissing-trap are self-evident, although both originated in the jargon of the 19th century prize-ring rather than that of the romance. Dribbler implies less than perfect manners; fly-trap, fly-catcher (both late 18C) imply the open mouth of stupidity, and flatter-trap (1840) marks the toady.

As a container for the teeth, the mouth appears as a bone-box (18C), box of dominoes (c.1822), ivory box (19C), box of worries (19C: worries is surely a mispronunciation of ivories), spoke-box, and graveyard (19C, the teeth resemble tombstones, a term that itself meant a discoloured and projecting tooth); coffee-mill (1800) implies not so much the consumption of the drink, as the grinding of teeth; as a facility for eating terms include gobbler (19C), dining room (1820), cakehole (1936 and perennially popular), potato-box, potato-jaw and potato-trap (all 19C), rattletrap (1820), rat-trap (1920s), mousetrap (19C, mouse appeared briefly too in the 1890s), sauce-box (19C, though the implication might be not of food, but of sauce meaning cheek), sewer, sink (also meaning throat) and coffer.

Grub, meaning food and rooted in the Dutch grubbelen, and hence the verb form of grave, meaning to bury, offers a variety of similar terms: grub-trap, grub-box, grub-shop and grubbery (all 19C). Terms related to drinking include Gin Lane (1830, also the throat, and presumably offering a tip of the hat to William Hogarth's celebrated engraving of 1751), grog-shop (1840), jug, sluice-house (1840) and sluicery (1820, usually a public house).

Terms for the throat, which often crossed over into those for mouth (and vice versa), include gutter alley and gutter lane

(19C, the former also meaning urinal), Beer Street (19C, see Gin Lane, above), common sewer and drain (both 19C), funnel (18C), gully hole (19C), Holloway (19C, the punning 'hollow way'; it also meant the vagina, and as Holloway, Middlesex, the lower bowel), Peck Alley (fr. peck: food), red lane (18C), Red Sea, Spew Alley (spew:vomit), swallow, thropple or throttle (14C, Northern dial.), whistle (especially as in 'wet one's whistle'), spud-grinder and wicket (SE for gate).

#### THE TEETH AND TONGUE

Terms for the teeth include choppers (1950), eating or laughing tackle, Hampsteads (1830, rhy. sl. Hampstead Heath: teeth; the term outlasted its once equally popular 19C peer Hounslow Heath), pearlies (19C), and the children's toothy pegs (1828). Earlier slang offered crashing cheats (16C, cheat or chete:thing), rattlers (19C) grinders (17C), bones (19C), dining room furniture (cf. dining room), munpins or mompyns (15C, 'mouth-pin'), and nut crackers (19C). Notably clean teeth were ivories (1780), while dirty or discoloured ones were dominoes (1820), a tombstone was a snaggle-tooth, as is a snag (Aus. 20C; thus snag-catcher: dentist).

Harman offers prating cheat and pratling cheat (cf.crashing cheat) for the tongue, terms preceded only by the Ancren Riwle's clap (c.1225). Subsequent terms includer clapper (1638) and clack (16C), rag (1825), red rag (17C) and red flannel (19C), dubber (also mouth), manchester (1812, possibly fr. mang, meaning talk in Scots dial. and/or fr. Romany mag: beg), glib (19C, orig. ribbon), velvet (17C, particularly in 'tip the velvet', a staple phrase of 19C pornography), jibb (19C, fr. Romany jib or chib, and still found in the phrase jibb in: talk one's way in), and quail pipe (17C, fr. a pipe used to decoy quail). Farmer and Henley also put forward toloben or tullibon but Partridge rejects this: the term comes from Romany tullipen meaning lard or grease, and at best can be seen as meaning 'paint' (for the face), a theory that becomes more acceptable when one remembers that ham, a bad actor, comes from ham-fatter, and refers to the those second-rate and

thus impoverished actors who were forced to rub hamfat over their faces, as a base for the powder that was then applied, rather than being able to afford sweeter smelling oils.

#### THE NOSE

As far as slang is concerned, the human nose has two primary functions: sticking out in front of the face, and facilitating the sense of smell. The first area, dominating the terminology, thus gives us beak (used by Thackeray in 1854, but probably much earlier: in 1598 the writer John Florio [1553?-1625] defined Naso adunco as 'a beake-nose.'), beezer (20C, also the name of a popular comic of the 1950s), conk or konk, (both fr L. concha, meaning big nose and immortalised by the nickname Conchy, bestowed upon the suitably adorned Duke of Wellington); the rhy. sl. I suppose (mid-19C); schnozzle, schnozzola, schnoz, snoz, snozzle, (all from Yid. / Ger. schnauze: snout and famously personified by the US comedian Jimmy 'Schnozzle' Durante [1893-1980]); other snout images include snoot (20C), snout (18C), snitch (17C), nozzle (1755, from the SE, itself is a diminutive of nose), bowsprit and proboscis (both from SE), peak (19C), gig (18C), and leading article (19C). Sneezing or blowing the nose gives bugle, honker, horn and hooter (all 20C), post-horn, paste-horn and trumpet (19C), and of course sneezer (1820).

The sense of smell gives the punning snuff-box (1853), snuffler (19C), snorter (1860), mell (either from a childish mispronunciation of smell or SE mell: club), smelling-cheat and smeller (both also meaning garden and dated respectively 16C and 17C), snotter and snottle-box (19C, from snot: mucus) and candlestick (a runny nose). Snorer, while not strictly a 'breathing' term, (1840) is self-evident.

A particularly prominent nose was a cheesecutter (19C) and a red-nosed man boasted a lighthouse (19C). The prize-ring underlines its particular interest with claret-jug (1840, claret:blood). Perhaps the only solo performer is boco or boko (19C), but then only if one discards the obvious link to beak, whether or not combined, as some claim, with coconut and turn instead to the

alternative etymology: the clown Joseph Grimaldi's [1779-1837] trademark tapping of his nose with the comment, 'C'est beaucoup'.

#### THE EARS

Ears are relatively under-represented in slang. Lug and lughole both stem from 16C Scottish dialect, while flaps (20C, occasionally used as a nickname) hints at their shape. A trio of other popular terms are cauliflowers (20C, ears deformed through boxing, hence the 1930s boxing term 'cauliflowered and mashed': squashed ears and mashed nose); tin ear (20C, no ear for music) and cloth ears (20C, unhearing, whether deliberately or otherwise).

#### THE EYES

16C villains, according to Thomas Harman, called their eyes glasyers or glaziers, and another old cant word glim, meaning light or fire, gives glims (18C, although the singular glim is still used by market traders today). Later terms include lamps (16C), peepers (17C) and ogles (17C, with its variations queer ogles: cross eyes, and rum ogles: bright eyes) daylights (18C), optics (18C) and killers (late 18C), and two examples of 19C rhy. sl.: mutton-pies (now defunct), and mince pies (these days almost invariably known as minces). Other 18th and 19th century terms, some of which are still current today, offer toplights (18C), deadlights (19C), twinklers (19C), front windows and windows (19C), gagers (19C US), blinkers (18C), orbs, seer and sees (19C), winkers and spy. Technological advance gives the 20C headlights (more often as spectacles); the modern babyblues are generic, the colour of the eyes so described is irrelevant.

Squinting eyes, in an era when physical deformity was openly mocked, bring: squinters, squinny-eyes, squin-eyes, squint-a-pipes and squint-a-fuego (a pun, presmuably, on the 17C ca-cafuego\* and on fire, as in glims\*). Chaney-eyed (fr. China or china) meant either small-eyed (the inference is of a China doll), or glass-eyed (china being the original material used for such eyes).

The black eye, given its occurrence in the rough and tumble of the ring or of street life, generated its own small lexicon. The eye

itself was a mouse (19C), a shiner or a stinker (19C), while the sufferer had or wore a full suit of mourning (both eyes), or of half-mourning (one eye). He might also be carrying the North-umberland arms (fr. the red and black spectacle-like badge that is basis of Percy arms), a painted peeper, or peepers in mourning. Bags under the eyes, occasioned not by violence but by tiredness or excess, were luggage.

#### THE NECK

Other than three pieces of rhy. sl. – three quarters of a peck, Gregory Peck, and bushel and peck – terms for the neck include the venerable colquarron (16C, presumably from a combination of col: neck plus quarrom\*: body) and scrag (18C), engendering a number of terms relating to judicial hanging, e.g. scragging (hanging), scrag 'em fair (the execution), scrag-boy (the hangman) and scragging post (the gallows). Squeezer (1840) has similar overtones of the gallows; indeed an alternative meaning is the noose. Similarly nub (c.1670) carries its own grim lexicon: as a verb (and possibly slightly earlier) it means to hang; nubbing (hanging), nubbing-cheat (the gallows) and nubbing-cove (the hangman); the nubbing-ken (lit. hanging room) is the sessions house, a cynically fatalistic reflection on the likely outcome of one's appearance there.

#### THE BREASTS

For the purposes of slang, men have no breasts. Body-builders boast of their **pecs**, from Latin *pectus* and thus the pectoral muscles, but beyond such jargon, the concept is essentially meaningless. Thus the words the words that follow, with careless ideological impurity, refer exclusively to the female.

Perhaps the most common of all 'breast-slang' is tits (fr. teats, and thus technically referring to nipples —known in slang as eyes —but generally used for the whole breast, and latterly even for the whole woman, eg. 'a nice bit of tit'), with such variations as titty and diddies, but this is surprisingly modern, dating only to the 19C. Tit, meaning a young girl, is older, originating in the 16C, but the

transference had to wait. Older are **bubs** and **bubbies** (17C, either from Latin *bibere*: to drink, or possibly —in the way that some claim that SE *pap* is onomatopoeic, stemming from the infant's sucking lips — from the hungry child's cries of 'Bub, bub!'). The modern versions — **boobs** and **boobies** — are almost equally as popular as **tits**, although perhaps more so in America.

The SE bosom, a word that may be rooted in an Old Aryan term meaning arm, and thus implying the space between the arms, gives a variety of terms that are more or less variations on the basic theme: mainly 20C, they include bazoom, bazooms, bazoomas, bazongas, gazungas or gazongas and possibly ballons.

Among further general terms are tremblers, hangers (US), wallopies (20C US, especially when large), chichis (20C, Mexican), lungs (20C), mams (20C, from SE mammaries and particularly popular in those soft-core men's maagzines devoted to the 'mature figure'), Mary Poppins (20C poss. a nonce use by the writer Tom Wolfe, teasing the otherwise squeaky-clean image of the fictional nanny), nay-nays and ninnies (possibly from the Spanish niño: child, or indeed from nanny), mountains, globes (19C), racks (of meat), meat market, blubber, blubber-bags and poonts (1870, possibly from font or even fountain). The protruberance of the breasts give bumpers, headlights, knobs, knockers (originally Aus. UK since 1950s), as well as top bollocks (20C) and forebuttocks (coined by Alexander Pope c.1727). Cupid's kettledrum (18C) and maracas (20C) presumably hint at the (rough) handling of the breasts.

Rhyming slang has offered cabman's rests (breasts), brace and bits and threepenny bits (tits), Bristols (either Bristol bits: tits or Bristol City: titty), Manchesters, Jerseys, (both with the unspoken City: titty), cats and kitties (titties), charlies (Aus.: Charlie Wheeler: Sheila\*: female, thus objectified as breasts); gib tesurbs is backslang for big breasts while berkeleys (as opposed to the more common berkeley\*: vagina), comes from the Romany berk, meaning breast. Breasts have also spawned three acronyms: BSHs (British Standard Handfuls), TNT (two nifty tits), and, much beloved by the US world of burlesque, T and A (tits and ass).

While most terms relate to the breasts as objects, sexual or otherwise, their role as the providers of milk has attracted a number of synonyms. Dairies (18C, with the phrases to sport or air the dairy: flash one's breasts), dugs and udders (19C, both from SE), milk bottles (20C, Aus.), milkwalk, milkshop and milky way (all 19C), milkers, feeding bottles, pap feeder, jujubes (20C), jugs and cream-jugs (originally Aus. c.1920) and norks, an Australian term, taken from Norco Co-Operative Ltd, a butter manufacturer of New South Wales.

Finally, the 'edibility' of the breasts gives apples (20C), cakes (20C, probably from cheesecake: pin-ups), cupcakes, grapes and grapefruits, lollies, dumplings, and catheads (US, a type of biscuit). The roundness of all these foods also underlines their supposed resemblance to the breast.

#### THE STOMACH

Harman's 16th century 'canting crew', usually adept in their adoption of the cant vocabulary, made no such provision for the stomach. They called it a belly (rom a variety of European roots, all meaning bag or sack) as did the general populace. Entering the language in the 10C it satisfied such literary authorities as Wyclif and Shakespeare until, c. 1840, Victorian prudishness drove it, if not underground, then into the shadowy borders of colloqualism and slang. There it remains, giving the rhy. sl.: Auntie Nelly, Darby or Derby Kelly, Ned Kelly (all 20C), Newington Butts (guts) and the rarer backsl.: elly-bay and yellib.

Alternative terms focus on the stomach's capacity, typically as a victualling office or department (19C), dumpling-depot (19C), breadbasket (18C), bread-bag (19C), meatbag (19C), beer barrel (19C, also meaning the body as a whole; beer-belly means simply a paunch), porridge bowl (19C, although porridge-hole means the mouth) and water-butt (19C). Tummy, tum and tum-tum (once the nickname of the corpulent King Edward VII) originate in the nursery and generally remain there. The more recent gizzard (20C) comes from the 10C SE, used

variously to describe animal or insect stomachs, which in turn comes from the Latin giærium: the cooked entrails of a fowl.

Other intestinal terms include gormy-ruddles (19C, from gormy ruttles = 'the strangles' = horses' quinsies [or tonsilitis]), kishkes (a Yiddishism based on the Russian word for intestines), tranklement or trollobubs, (19C), and pudding or pudding-house (18C) with the combination pudding-belly meaning fat, although the cant pudding-ken, which 'translates' as pudding house, is in fact a cookshop. Wiffle-woffle (19C) was a stomach ache.

A fat stomach could be a **bow window** (19C) or a **corporation** (c.1750). This latter, while owing something to the SE 'corpulent', is a dig at the self-indulgent gluttony of the Corporation of the City of London. Thus an **alderman**: a turkey, and an **alderman** in **chains**: a turkey garlanded with sausages.

The ribs, adjacent to the stomach, are slats (20C, first US, then Aus. and finally UK), while the heart can be a pump (19C), a raspberry tart (rhy. sl.) or a ticker. The womb was once known as a kidney, while the lungs were bellows or bellers (19C); thus an earlier version of 'blow one out' was 'give one the bellows'.

#### THE ARM

Compared with the hands and fingers to which it is attached, the arm has relatively few slang synonyms. Those that do exist, include **props** (19C, also meaning crutches); the rhyming slang **Chalk Farm** (19C) and **false alarm** (20C, mainly military) **bender** (19C, also used for elbow), **hoop stick** (19C), and two terms also used for hand: **fin** (19C) and **daddle** (18C, possibly from **paddle**). The shoulder has a single backslang form: **redloch**.

#### THE HANDS, FISTS AND FINGERS

Given their interchangeability in standard English, the slang terms for hands, fists and fingers similarly provide a good deal of crossover. It is thus simplest to take them in a single section. Harman gives fambles (16C) for hands, and throws in fambling cheat (a ring). Half a century later (c.1600) a new term, goll, appeared, followed c. 1690 by fam and fem (both from Romany and presumably

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abbreviations of famble). Fin and daddle (both of which can also mean arm and finger) are 18C, as is mauley (often found in the prize-ring context, and either from SE maul, or the Gaelic lamh, the Shelta malya or the Romany mylier — each of which means hand). Mauler and maulers (fingers) arrived in the 19C.

Slang terms for the hand often compare it to an animal appendage: typically, paw and forefoot (both 16C, the latter popularised by Shakespeare), flipper (19C), mitten (19C) and mitt (US 19C, adopted in the UK 20C), pud and pudsey (17C, both possibly from Dutch poot: paw).

The grabbing potential of the hand is found in cornstealer, picker, clutch, feeler (19C), in which context the terms elide with those for fingers and can also be found defined as such. Further terms, ostensibly for fingers but equally feasible for hand include claws (thus the 17C phrase: 'claw me and I'll claw thee', a precursor of the modern 'scratch my back...'), paddle (19C), fives, forks (18C, specifically the middle and forefingers), flappers, grapplers, grappling irons, gropers, hooks, lunch-hooks, meathooks (19C), cunt-hooks (20C) divers, pickers and stealers (17C, from the mid-16C catechism: 'To keep my hands from picking and stealing'), Ten Commandments (15C, especially of a woman), ten bones, ticklers, pinkies (19C, Scots dial. a single pinky is the little finger), muck-forks (mid-19C), bunch of fives (19C), bunch of sprouts (thus a sprout means a beating). In rhy. sl. lean and lingers (20C) and bell ringers (19C) denote fingers, while Mary Anns, German bands (a 19C term that vanished abruptly with the declaration of World War I, and the departure of the once popular German bands from British streets) and the backslang deenach mean hands.

Terms mainly applicable to the fists include dukes (19C, either from rhy. sl. Duke of York: fork, or from the Romany dukker, meaning tell a fortune, probably through palmistry); dukes generate such popular phrases as 'put up one's dukes' (prepare to fight with the fists) and 'grease the dukes' (to bribe). A further pugnacious term is raw-'uns.(19C). Finally, phrases for shaking hands include tip a daddle, tip the fives, tip the gripes in a dangle, fam-grasp and sling one's mauley.

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#### THE LEGS

The first recorded slang term for legs is stamps (1567), taken directly from their function; it was followed by pins (16C, from the primary meaning of pin as a peg, and gave such phrases as 'on ones pins': to be feeling well, or in good form) and then by gams (1780, from French jambes, thus 'flutter a gam': to dance), and hams (fr. the 10C SE ham: the bend in the back of knee, then, in the 16C, the buttock and upper thigh taken together and thence, somewhat imprecisely, the whole leg). Hams thus creates the 18C hamcases: trousers, poss fr. Rom. hamyas: knee breeches, ham-bags: girls' drawers (c.1900, and presumably a pun on handbags) and ham frills (c.1925 girls' running shorts). Ham hocks and hammers are 20C developments. Rhyming slang for legs, possibly coincidentally, offers ham and eggs (19C), bacon and eggs, scotch eggs or scotch pegs (19C, now found either as scotches, or pegs).

Other terms include drivers, drumsticks (19C), shanks' pony, mare or nag (1795, punning on shanks: legs), stumps (19C, and now found mainly in the phrase 'stir one's stumps'), cabbage stumps (19C), timbers (18C, originally a wooden leg but soon any leg), sticks (19C), trams (20C), trespassers (19C), the punning understandings (19C) and the literal underpinners (19C) and pods (19C, esp. of children's legs; thus podding: toddling).

The shape of legs accounted for a number of specific terms. Doog gels meant good legs, but most terms were derogatory: cheese-cutters (1820, bandy legs), calves gone to grass, spindle shanks and trapsticks (all meaning thin legs; the latter taken from the stick used in a popular game); marley stopper (fr. the image of stopping a marley – a marble – with one's foot; thus splayfooted), skew-the-dew (splay footed); spiddock pot legs (ungainly; from their supposedly resembling a spigot) and Irish arms (thick legs). Knees were marrowbones or the rhyming biscuits and cheese; baker-kneed and cross-legged all meant knock-kneed.

## THE FOOT

Like much early slang, the first terms for feet reflected the animal kingdom, i.e. hoofs (16C), trotters (17C) although trots did not

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appear until the 20C. **Dew beaters** arrived in the 18C; similar terms were **dew-dusters**, **dew-treaders**; all also used to describe pedestrians who take dawn strolls — when the dew was still on the grass. Other early usages were **ards** (an old cant term, possibly related to the Nordic *ard*: plough, and which by the 17C and in the singular meant hot, presumably from the French *ardent*), and **hocks** (late 18C and another reference to the farmyard).

The 19C produced creepers, kickers, trampers, beetle-crushers (the latter enthusiastically popularised by the still new *Punch*; especially in reference to large feet, and of the shoes that encase them), understandings, tootsies (nursery use), boot-trees, double-breasters (19C, specifically when referring to a club foot), pudseys\*, crabs (originally shoes), goers, mud flaps, plates of meat (rhy. sl.; the singular plate of meat, however, meant street). The 20C has seen a couple of canine additions: dogs (US) and puppies.

# THE VAGINA

Other than terms for drinking, which run substantially over 2,000 according to one recent compiler, and those for sexual intercourse the slang terms for the vagina outstrip any rivals, and certainly those for the penis. There are nearly 900 listed below, and there are doubtless others. They encompass what is generally acknowledged as the most injurious of monosyllablic epithets, and run the course through to some of the most floridly convoluted of literary euphemisms. Aside from general terms there are at least twenty sub-sections into which the larger vocabulary may be grouped. They range through rural-agricultural, antagonistic, terms that see the vagina as food, the many that see it as an entrance, a hole or a slit, those that equate it with places and things and proper names, the coarse, the crude and the romantic. As with any section of this book, many are dead, but a surprising number flourish on. Men think of sex, it is claimed, every eight seconds; the slang lexicon, if

nothing else, gives them plenty of terms in which to couch their repetitive mental obsession. If such a mass of terms appears to prove yet again feminism's contention that men see women primarily as sex objects, then so be it. If slang is indeed the most 'man-made' of languages then it is never more so than when dealing with the female genitals.

#### THE MONOSYLLABLE

The monosyllable, a term possibly coined in 1714 but first set down specifically in Frances Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1785), is of course the primary euphemism for that ultimate in four-letter words: cunt. Cunt itself 'a nasty word for a nasty thing', as Grose dismisses it, appears as 'C—t', although he offers roots in the Greek konnos and the Latin cunnus, and lists the French synonym con. This reticence was by no means limited to Grose (who, a single entry earlier, was perfectly happy to list cunnythumbed: 'to double one's fist, with the thumb inwards, like a woman): not until its supplement of 1972 did the OED (albeit unphased by prick\*) list the term, and other, lesser dictionaries, on both sides of the Atlantic, showed themselves equally coy. Many otherwise authoritative American tomes, hamstrung either by the religious right or the politically correct left, have yet to break the taboo. Yet as Eric Partridge, writing in 1931 (six years before the term would be included in the DSUE), put it, 'to ignore a very frequently used word - one indeed used by a large proportion, though not the majority, of the white population of the British Empire - is to ignore a basic part of the English language.'

The first use the OED can find for the term appears c.1230 when Gropecuntelane is listed among the streets that made up the stews or brothel area of Southwark. Given the environment, it must be assumed that the term was already in general use; it would also appear from subsequent early citations that the term, while vulgar, was descriptive rather than obscene. Lanfranc, for instance, used it while writing on surgery around 1400. But by the end of the 15C cunt had gone off-limits. Two centuries later it was deemed legally obscene: to print the word in full rendered one liable to prosecu-

tion. It's most notorious appearance in the dock came in 1960 when it featured as the most abhorrent of those alleged obscenities enunciated so lovingly by the prosecuting counsel in the trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover. It has yet, if ever, to return to grace.

As Grose suggested, the word can be traced back to the Greek, although Partridge disputes whether konnus—a trinket, a beard, or the wearing of the hair in a tuft—is actually linked to the Latin cunnus which meant both vagina and, like such English terms as crack, slit and pussy, the woman (especially if seen as promiscuous) who possesses it. More likely Greek roots are kusos and kusthos, which are both related to the earlier Sanskrit cushi, meaning ditch. Cunnus itself, setting a pattern for its descendant, was already outlawed as obscene in Rome. Horace used it, Cicero did not.

While the French, more heavily influenced by Latin, have con (and the Spanish coño), with its obvious links to cunnus, the English cunt or cunte, as found in Middle English, takes its inspiration from a variety of German (kunte) and Scandinavian (kunta, kunte) terms. It would appear, in this form, to be a combination of the ultimate root cu (which also lies at the basis of cow), which appears to imply quintessential femininity and the nt of the European synonyms.

Aside from such obvious diminutives as cunny, cunnikin, cuntkin and cuntlet, and such variations as the rhyming slang Berkeley (or Berkshire, hence the pejorative berk) Hunt, sharp and blunt or grumble and grunt (all 19C) and the backslang tenuc, directly cognate with cunt are coynte, queynte and quaint (which last persisted in Northern dialect until the late 19C). Similar, although linked not to Scandinavia but to Wales, where awm means valley (cf. cushi, above) are quim, quem and quimsby, the first of which at least is still widely used. Quiff, a contemporary back-formation from the 18C quiffing: copulation, may well be related, as presumably is whim-wham (18C).

Among other 'non-specific' terms for vagina the old Romany minj, transformed via Suffolk dialect into the general slang minge survives in wide usage, as does fanny (plus fan and the backsl. naf; US fanny means only buttocks), a 19C coinage of no discernible etymology, although some theories would link it to John Cleland's mid-18C novel Fanny Hill (see engine for Fanny Hill as a double

pun). Combinations with fanny give the defunct fanny-artful and fanny-fair. Other terms include chuff (also meaning backside), and the older cornucopia (19C, fount of all good things) and gallimaufry, (19C, from the 17C SE: mess or jumble and the 17C slang: mistress). Conjuring book (with overtones of SE conjugal) and conundrum presumably stem from the basic cunt.

The US has a number of homegrown terms. Foremost among them is **poon** or **poontang** (both 20C), which some attribute to a perversion of the French putain: prostitute, while others, Partridge among them, opt for pidgin, from the Chinese, which also has the variants poong tai and poong kai. Vag is an obvious abbreviation, ginch (1950s) may be linked to an earlier, British use of ginch meaning class or elegance (thus ginchy: excellent), while trim (20C) parallels the pickpockets' use of the word to mean a back pocket. Seemingly paradoxical is the use of cock, otherwise one of the most widely used words for penis, to mean vagina. Restricted to the US South and the islands of the Caribbean, the term may be related to the 18C British term cockles, meaning labia. Similarly defiant of a clear etymology are cooch, coot, cooze, cou and cuzzy (all US 20C). They all would appear to be related to cunt or even cock, but in quite what way remains unknown.

## **EUPHEMISM**

Before moving on to the realms of pure literature, in which one will encounter some of the most elaborate attempts to bypass the naming of the vagina, there are a number of terms of non-literary euphemism, some of which stem from the nursery, and others simply from the strictures of embarrassment. Aside from Grose's monosyllable, nonny-no (16C, also a general term for sex) and naughty (19C, thus do the naughty: to copulate), the squeamish continue to offer the careful Victorian vagueness of thingamy, thingumabob, thingumajig, what-do-you-call-it, you-know-what, you-know-where, the place, it, that, the thing, that there, the ineffable, the name it not and the nameless. Down there, Downshire and downstairs at least point in the right direction, while scabbard, quiver and sheath are translations of

the Latin vagina. Commodity and novelty (both 18C) return readers to the opaque, while love-flesh could be anywhere. Only with where the monkey sleeps (19C, an earlier version of the coarser where the monkey shoves his nuts: the anus) and where Uncle's doodle goes (19C, reflecting Victorian pornography's fascination with incest) acknowledge a less determinedly 'innocent' terminology.

Other euphemisms, or otherwise unquanitifiable terms include bumbo (18C, from the West Indies), cloth, catherine wheel, cogie (Scots), forge (19C), fobus (late 19C), agility (as in 'show one's agility': for a woman inadvertently to reveal her vagina), tivvy, (19C, from SE activity), fancy-bit, funny bit and funniment (19C), fie for shame (19C schoolgirls' use), the fleshly part, jewel (19C, cf. family jewels), knick-knack (19C) masterpiece (18C, cf.16C 'to be hit on the master vein': to conceive), lea-rigs, never-out (19C), non[e]such (18C), Number-Nip (19C), ware, rest and be thankful (19C), old ding (fr. ding: to strike?) and poor man's blessing (19C).

## LITERARY EUPHEMISM

It is perhaps in literature that one finds the most elaborate of euphemisms to describe sex in general, and the sexual organs in particular. The modern era, sedulously rejecting euphemism for harder-edged narrative offers few such alternatives, but a more mannered world made up for such 20C shortcomings.

With The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (1749, better known as Fanny Hill) John Cleland (1709-89) managed, quite deliberately, to produce a major pornographic work — one that stood virtually unrivalled until today's mass-market porn boom began in the Holywell Street shops of the mid-19C — without using a single obscenity. His terms for what a contemporary called the agreeable ruts of life (punning on both senses of rut) included the cleft (of flesh), the cloven spot, etcetera, the central furrow and the treasure of love.

Shakespeare used a wide variety of bawdy, although by no means all of his own creation. Such terms as do appear to be his invention

include circle, commodity and dearest bodily part. More prolific by far was Britain's first translator of Rabelais, the Scot Sir Thomas Urquhart (1611-60). As well as the unparallelled aphrodisiacal tennis court (a precursor of the later gymnasium) Urquhart offered callibistry (fr. callibisters: testicles and the suffix -try: place of), the carnal-trap, contrapunctum (literally counterpoint: the penis being the 'point' in question), cunny-barrow (punning on cunny = coney = rabbit), Hans Carvel's Ring (a name taken from a popular and bawdy tale by Poggio and Ariosto among others), the hypogastrian cranny (fr. the Greek hypogastrium: that section of the body below the belly and above the privates), justum, skincoat and leather (although this last was in general use by the 16C, and had meant skin in SE since the 14C).

Robert Burns (1759-96), whose more reputable poetry was balanced, to the delight of some and the horror of others by his collection of what can best be seen as proto-type 'rugby songs' *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (c.1800). His contributions to the vaginal vocabulary include canister, Cupid's furrow, the gate of life, gyvel, mill, nest in the bush, spleuchan, tirly-whirly and wame (fr. womb).

Equally prolific was the 17C playwright and songsmith Thomas D'Urfey or Durfey (1653-1723), author of many satires, melodramas, farces and other tales. His coinages tend to reflect the image of the vagina as receptacle and include toll dish (used to measure grain at a mill), the mouth that cannot bite, the placket-box (fr. SE placket: a slit in a petticoat), sack, kettle and copyhold ('the tenure of lands being parcel of a manor, at the will of the lord according to the custom of the manor'), as well as weather gig, hone (a whetstone used to grind knives, as was the 17C whetting corn) and the mark of the beast.

Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343-1400) has the delicate belle-chose and the much more vulgar nether end, nether eye and nether lips, while John Donne (1572-1631) opts for both the best and the worst part, the exchequer (prefiguring a number of later vagina as money coinages) and a part of India (a geographical reference echoed in antipodes, qv). G. A. Stevens opted for lengthier phrases, amongst which are the eye that weeps most

when best pleased, the mouth that says no words, life's dainty and the book-binder's wife (a pun on her pastime: 'manufacturing in sheets').

Lord Rochester, who shocked the public and outraged the courts when, in defiance of law he spelt out the word 'cunt' in a number of writings, and whose *Poems on Several Occasions* (1680) and play *Sodom:or the Quintesence of Debauchery* (1684) made him the frankest writer on sex until the 20C, still allowed himself some euphemisms. Those for vagina included the **kennel**, the **best in Christendom**, the **bull's eye** (cf. **target**) and the **crown of sense**.

Many other writers have added their contribution. The American Walt Whitman (1819-92) has the bath of birth and the lady flower; Thomas Carew (1594-1640) used the slang term Cyprian, meaning whore, to create Cyprian arbour, Cyprian-cave and Cyprian strait as well as the very flowery grove of Eglantine; John Florio (c.1553-1625), translator, tutor and courtier, as well as editor in 1598 of the Italian dictionary A Worlde of Wordes, has gear (equally, and more generally applicable to a man) and the positively bodice-ripping Mount-Faulcon; the romantic poet Robert Herrick (1591-1674) has living fountain while Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) adds the mouth thankless.

Bereft of such pedigrees, the line between simple euphemism and its literary peers is a fine one and dependent as much as anything on the richness of the language involved. On that basis, and on no other, the following terms are included here: Venus's Secret Cell, Venus's Highway, Venus's Honeypot, Venus's Mark, Cupid's Alley, Cupid's anvil, Cupid's arbour, Cupid's cave, Cupid's cloister, Cupid's corner and Cupid's cupboard; the hogstye of Venus may refer to the Homeric goddess Circe, who turned men into swine. Also the ABC, (19C, the start of things, i.e. life), Alpha and Omega, (the beginning and end and thus the ultimate in pleasure), Abraham's bosom (upon which one rests); Adam's own altar, the altar of hymen, the altar of love and the altar of pleasure; lamp of love, love's harbour and love's paradise; the treasure and the mine of pleasure; leading article (19C), almanack (19C), amulet and everlasting wound.

#### **NAMES**

Setting aside the pet names that some people create for their sexual organs, slang references to the vagina include a number of proper names. Among them are Aunt Maria (1903), a Dutch clock (a term taken from the rhy. sl. Dutch\* = duchess of Fife = wife, and which also means a bedpan), Jacob's ladder (19C, up which one climbs) madge and Madge Howlett (18C, also dialect for a barn owl), maddikin (possibly from madge-ken), Mary Jane (19C), the punning Miss Brown and Miss Laycock (18C), Molly's Hole, (19C, from molly\*: a compliant girl) the Mother of All Saints, the Mother of All Souls and the Mother of St Patrick (all 18C) and tu quoque (18C, from the Latin 'you also' and defined by Grose as 'The mother of all saints'). Perhaps the most fascinating is the otherwise impenetrable Buckinger's boot, which refers to the hapless Matthew Buckinger (fl.1750) who was born limbless 'notwithstanding which', remarks Grose, 'he drew coats of arms very neatly and could write the Lord's Prayer within the compass of one shilling'; thus for him a boot could only fit his third leg\*, his penis.

## A PLACE FOR THE PENIS

If in slang the male genitals are seen most basically as an object to be placed, thrust or otherwise introduced into the vagina, then a number of complementary terms exist that categorise the vagina as no more than a receptacle for the penis. Many, such as the confessional and Bluebeard's closet (where respectively father confessor\* and Bluebeard\* mean penis) simply reverse or revise the original phallic term. Others of this type include penwiper, (19C), pintlecase (19C), pin-case and pin-cushion (17C), needlecase (19C, hence needlewoman\*: a whore), toolbox and tool chest; cuckoo's nest, goldfinch's nest (1827), phoenix nest and bird's nest. Even more direct are pole hole (20C), niche-cock (18C), prickholder, cock-chafer, cock-holder, the Cock Inn, cock-loft, cock-pit, Cock-Shire, and cock-shy. Diddly and diddly pout (mid-19C) combine diddle: penis and pouter: vagina. In doodle case and doodle sack doodle is

the penis. Naggie (19C) is the passive element of a set which includes the 17C nag: penis and nags: testicles. Similar passivity can be deduced from quarry (18C), factorum and ornament.

Less direct are cradle, tickle Thomas (19C), standing room for one (19C) and the custom house (customs officer\*: penis), Eve's custom-house and the receipt of custom (in all of which institutions 'Adam made the first entry'). Finally a group of 'technological' terms involving locks and keys: machine (19C, also the penis), keyhole (19C), lock, locker and lock of locks (all 18C), and jigger (19C, from jigger: lock, although elsewhere it means key and thus also penis). Other receptacles include pitcher (17C), pipkin (17C, from SE for a small earthenware jug; thus crack a pipkin: to deflower), cellar, cellarage, cellar-door (19C), corner-cupboard (the 'corner' being the fork of the legs), bucket, caldron, mortar, (19C, the opposite of the phallic pestle\*), box (20C), fuzzy cup (20C), bag of tricks (19C, also used for the penis and testes) and lucky bag, the 19C fairground equivalent of the latterday lucky dip.

## SEMEN

If the vagina is a receptacle for the penis, then, logically, it exists equally to extract and receive semen. As with the penis there are very few terms relating to procreation — only the somewhat contrived certificate of birth and brat-getting place — but several which deal with ejaculation and its product. As well as the punning seminary (19C), they include lather-maker (19C), butter-boat and melting pot (butter and melted butter: semen), hive and beehive (honey: semen) and honeypot (17C, but popularised in Terry Southern's Candy [1958]), the cream jug (cf. creamstick\*) and the churn (which 'turns milk into butter'). Semen as 'milk' reappears in milking pail and milk pan, while milt market refers to milt, or fish eggs, another term for semen.

# PUBIC HAIR

Slang is no great respecter of physiology, and while the pubic hair is not the vagina itself, the terminology happily elides the two.

Terms include bun (17C, also meaning squirrel and rabbit, which has strong sexual overtones), broom, busby (otherwise referring to a military fur cap), the crown and feathers (19C), black bess and black jock (though jock\* or jockum\* both mean penis too), ace and ace of spades (19C, thus 'play the ace and take the Jack': for a woman to receive a man). The red ace, red C (19C) and rufus (19C, from SE rufous: reddish) transfer the 'ace' of the hair to the actual flesh. Most obvious are a selection based on the hair itself: the hair-court (thus take a turn in hair court: to copulate), Hairyfordshire (19C, cf. Downshire and County Down) and the hairy ring and hairy oracle (18C). Other terms include oracle, muff (17C), patch (19C) and sporran (19C).

Natural images dominate terms for the pubic hair. Garden dates to the 16C, the grove of eglantine (also used as vagina) is 17C as is sweet briar (Rosa rubiginosa) otherwise known as the eglantine; Parsley is 18C, mustard-and-cress 19C, along with grass (cf. greens\*), lawn, forest, shrubbery, moss (cf. righteous moss), stubble (giving shoot in the stubble and take a turn in the stubble: to have intercourse), hedge on the dyke, and the literary boskage of Venus and Cupid's arbour. Bush, one of the most enduring terms for male or female pubic hair, is a 19C coinage; similar terms (all 19C) include damber-bush, dilberrybush (cf. dilberry creek), gooseberry-bush (it is this bush of course, rather than the fruiting variety, beneath which the child is allegedly born), furze-bush, quim-bush, whin-bush and the 20C Fort Bushy. Beard is 18C and silent beard 19C, while brush (20C) gives the shaving brush and the scrubbing brush. The animal kingdom gives bearskin (19C), feather (18C), fluff (19C), fur (18C) and the punning fur-below (18C, from the SE meaning of flounce or trimming). Fud (18C, Sc. dial.) and scut (16C) both reflect the SE tail while tail feathers is based on the slang tail: vagina, which produces such combinations as tail fence: hymen, tail fruit: children, tail gap, tail gate and tail hole: all vagina and tail flowers: menses, as well as the tail pipe, tail pin, tail tackle and tail trimmer, all of which mean penis.

The position of the pubic hair 'down there', gives Downshire, the front door mat, the lower-wig, the nether eyebrow,

nether lashes and nether whiskers (all 19C); its proximity to the vagina creates belly-bristles, quim whiskers, quim-wig, cunnyskin, cunt-curtain, motte fleece and mott-carpet (all 19C); twatrug is 20C. Further terms include area (19C, abbrev. of SE pubic area), cotton and wool (19C), banner, plush, and a lady's low toupee; cuffs and collars (20C) denotes pubic hair the same colour as head hair.

## FEAR AND LOATHING

The concept of the vagina dentata in a physical form may have been abandoned but, as much feminist theory would claim, male fear and even hatred of the vagina persists unabated: emotions that are faithfully reflected in slang. The menace of a term such as snatch, with its variations snatch-blatch and snatch box (all 19C) is undeniable, as is the loathing implicit in the parts of shame, the vaccuum, the sperm-sucker (19C), the suck and swallow (19C), the wastepipe (19C), the stank, stench trench, stink and stinkpot (all 20C).

Similar emotions are found in fool trap (c.1840, which also means a whore), flycage, flytrap and fly-catcher, (19C, with the additional image of an open mouth catching flies) and bite (17C, although the term may in fact come from the Anglo-Saxon byht: the fork of the legs). Magnet (18C), regulator (18C: the vagina as power), fort and fortress may imply a grudging respect, but rattlesnake canyon, snapper, snapping turtle (puss) (20C), nasty, bit of rough, touch 'em up, tuzzymuzzy (1710) and catch-em-alive-o are unequivocally antagonistic, as are mangle (1860), manhole, man-trap, (18C), eel-pot, eel-skinner, prickskinner and skin-the-pizzle, (19C) rasp, (19C), rattle bollocks, (18C), rob the ruffian (19C), rough-o, rough-and ready and rough-and-tumble (all mid-19C). Less aggressive, but certainly dismissive are various references to physical deformities, mainly coined in the 18C: blind eye, dumb glutton, dumb oracle and dumb squint. Nastiest of all are claptrap, firelock, fireplace and firework, in all of which clap\* and fire\* refer to venereal disease.

#### THE HOLE

In terms of direct language, equating hole with vagina is as basic as one can get. Unsurprisingly such terms abound. Hole itself dates to the 16C or even earlier; there are several combinations: hole of content (16C), hole of holes, queen of holes, Holloway and upper Holloway (twin puns from 1860), pigeonhole, bunghole (usually found as the anus), sportsman's gap and sportsman's hole (19C, a term that mixes the huntsman's image of a gap in a hedge with the term sporting house\* meaning brothel), touch hole (17C) and sear (16C) both referring to the touch-hole at which the match sets off the charge in a pistol, black hole (19C) and black ring (19C), dark-hole and second hole from the back of the neck. Glory hole is 20C, although it is often found as gay jargon, referring to holes bored in the inter-connecting walls of public lavatory stalls. Inner depths are similarly suggested by dark, cave of harmony, bore and maw, while ring too dates back to 16C. Other 'holes' include drain and gully (both 19C), grummet (19C, from the SE use to mean a ring of rope and latterly a washer), furry hoop (20C) and golden doughnut (20C, Australia). Finally darkness, circularity and depth combine in pit (17C), bob and hit (rhy. sl.), pit hole, pit mouth, pit of darkness, bottomless pit and the marginally more congratulatory passion pit (20C, but also popular as a drive-in cinema, where, as in the synonymous Olympic pool, one 'does the breast stroke'). While not specifically holes, open C (19C) and open charms (a pun on open arms?) make their meaning obvious.

# THE SLIT

As popular as hole is slit, a term that originates in the 18C and perhaps because of the relatively greater physiological accuracy, there are more 'slit' terms than 'hole' ones in slang. They include chasm, crack (16C, personified a century later as meaning whore as well), cranny (19C, thus cranny-hunter\*: penis), crevice (19C), gap (18C), gape (19C) and gaper (19C), canyon, breach (19C), ditch, furrow and one-ended furrow (both 19C), gulf, gutter (19C), gash (18C), slice of life (cf. agreeable ruts...),

slot, trench (18C), grotto, harbour, harbour of hope (19C), alcove (19C), arbour (19C), chink (18C), dyke, prime cut, notch (18C) and nick in the notch (19C). Inglenook means slit, while crinkum-crankum (1780) has an SE meaning of a narrow, winding passage (although crinkum\* itself means venereal disease). A dimple draws on the SE meaning of a depression in the flesh, while placket, used by Shakespeare in King Lear (1605) is the opening or slit at the top of a skirt or petticoat, for convenience in taking it on and off.

Most 'slit' terms are relatively quotidian but one, twat, led to a lexicographically celebrated misunderstanding. Twat has meant vagina since 1656: it is related to twachylle or twittle which, as twitchel mean a narrow passage; a dialect usage, twatch means to mend a gap in a hedge; combinations include twat-masher and twat-faker (pimp) and twat-rug (pubic hair). None of which it turned out, was apparent to the poet Robert Browning (1812-1889) who in 1841 published Pippa Passes, a mainly verse 'drama' drawing on his studies of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays and known today for its blithe assurance that 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world.' As part of his research Browning read the poem 'Vanity of Vanities' (1660), in which he found the couplet 'They talk't of his having a Cardinalls Hat, / They'd send him as soon an Old Nuns Twat.' The coarseness of the verse was lost on the poet, who simply assumed that twat denoted some part of a nun's attire. Thus in Pippa Passes he wrote blithely, 'Then, owls and bats / Cowls and twats, / Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods, / Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry.' Others were less innocent, and the lines remained a good source of schoolroom sniggering. Browning was never to be disabused of his belief: he died in happy ignorance since no-one could find a delicate enough means of explaining his error.

## **PERSONIFICATIONS**

As well as the proper names above, the vagina is subject to a wide variety of personifications, few of them particularly complimentary. A number of terms meant prostitute as well as vagina: notably gigg (18C), fly by night (19C), housewife (19C), shakebag (a whore

in 18C, a vagina in 19C), breadwinner, scate and flap (17C), while others were alternatively used for the brothel: button-hole, (19C, buttonhole factory: a brothel, buttonhole-worker: a whore), cab-mat (cab: brothel), case or kaze (fr. casa: house and thus brothel) and goatmilker (c 1840, originally meaning whore, while goat house meant brothel). The milliner's shop (19C) may have referred to the real-life milliners, many of whom could found working as dollymops, or semi-amateur whores to supplement their meagre income.

Other terms include the 'musical' trio of instrument, fiddle (1800, cf: strum: strumpet), and lute (upon which one 'plays'). Itch: sexual excitement gives itcher and itching jenny (19C) while slang's eternal propensity for puns gives old hat (17C, 'because it is frequently felt'), saddle (17C) and later omnibus (19C, 'everyone gets a ride'; like the 20C town bike\* omnibus also meant a prostitute or promiscuous amateur), and sampler (19C, from its image of 'needlework'). Tile, itself slang for hat, may be related to old hat. Further terms include vade-mecum, wanton ace (cf: ace), jing-jang (possibly from jig-a-jig\* meaning copulation) joxy and jock (though jockum\* also means penis).

Woman seen purely as a sex object, and as such personified by her vagina can be seen in **keifer** (also **kaifa**, **kyfer**), **booty** (20C, a synonym for US **ass\***), **futy**, **futz**, **pfotz** and **pfotze**, (19C and US 20C, all may stem from a euphemism for **fuck\***), **downybit** (19C, also an attractive girl) **coupler** (fr. SE *coupling*: sexual intercourse) and **basket-maker** (18C, **basket-making\***: copulation.)

More complimentary, or at least neutral, are beauty, little sister (19C), bed fellow, brown madam (18C), chum, Lady Jane (1850), Lady Berkeley (presumably from Berkelely Hunt\*), old woman (19C, as in old man\*: cock), and spinning jenny (19C, from the machine patented in 1770 by James Hargreaves).

The relations of the vagina and money, or at least its money-making potential, underpin a number of terms, although a few, notably ha'penny (20C) and ninepence (19C?), with their euphemistic use towards and amongst young girls (as is peewee, though with no monetary overtones) must be allowed some degree of innocence. Less naive are the openly materialistic money-maker and

money-spinner (both 19C), till and money-box (both 19C) and purse (17C, also meaning scrotum). Others include bank, bazaar, and budget. Race and geography come into the remaining terms, of which only the first, the Irish fortune (19C) survives. Others are the Whitechapel fortune (19C), the Tetbury portion (18C, 'a cunt and a clap'), the Rochester and Whitechapel portions (17C, 'two torn smocks and what Nature gives') and the Tipperary fortune ('two town lands [the breasts], stream's town [the pudend] and ballinocack [the anus]' Grose).

## **PLACES**

The vagina has also become identified with a number of places, real or otherwise. Botany Bay, the Antipodes and the South Pole (19C), stress 'physical' geography, as well as hinting at the 20C go down south, meaning to perform cunnilingus. Cape Horn puns on horn\*: an erection or sexual excitement, Cape of Good Hope stresses expectations, while County Down is a double pun.

Mons Meg (19C) refers, according to Partridge, to a 15C gun kept in Edinburgh Castle, while Jack Straw's Castle (19C) was named for a leader of the Peasants' Revolt (1381) and as a pub near Hampstead Heath latterly patronised by Charles Dickens, William Thackeray and other Victorian literary heavyweights. The use of Exeter Hall, better known for its temperance sermons and as the first London home of the YMCA, was presumably a tease, while Fumbler's Hall (18C) was a purely metaphorical image, as are Lapland (fr. the Shakespearian lap: vagina), Leather-Lane (fr. leather\*), Mount Pleasant (19C) and Shooter's Hill (upon which the amorously inclined might 'take a turn'). The Netherlands (18C) are, of course, synonymous with the low countries, and in turn the lowlands. The Thatched House (under the hill) may have referred marginally to the actual Thatched House Lodge (built for the keepers of Richmond Park in 1673 and subsequently owned by Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole) but its real inspiration is thatch as in pubic hair; the cognate house under the hill stresses the 'down there' aspects of the phrase, further emphasised in the 'decadent' illustrator Aubrey Beardsley's (1872-98) title for

his sole and unfinished erotic novel *Under the Hill* (1898). The 'under' motif is also found in **under-belongings**, **under-dimple**, **under-entrance**, **under-world**, plus the punning **undeniable** and **undertaker**.

Less geographically specific are a number of other places, such as the palace of pleasure and garden of pleasure (hence the garden padlock: a menstrual cloth), pleasure boat, pleasure ground, pleasure place and privy paradise (all 19C); the happy hunting grounds (1870, more usually equated with death) puns on the 'Wild West' usage. The vagina could equally stand as heaven or hell (18C, thus put the devil into hell: a phrase taken from Bocaccio and meaning to copulate). It could also be home sweet home (1870), a hotel (19C, cf: Cock Inn, Cupid's Arms, etc), a leaving shop (19C, originally an unlicensced pawnbrokers), the nursery (19C), premises and lodgings (both 19C) and the ecclesiastical pulpit or vestry (thus vestryman\*: penis); finally, though physically paradoxical, it could be the attic (1903).

Physiologically more accurate are those terms that refer to the bodily centrality of the vagina. They include the central office, centre of attraction (both 19C), centre of bliss (18C), centrique part (coined by John Donne), the Middle Kingdom (an acknowledgement of the 19C fascination with things Egyptian), the midlands (19C), middle-cut, axis and central cut.

## ROAD

To persist with 'geography', the vagina has also been seen as a road. Such images include road itself (17C), the road to a christening, the road to heaven, alley, pipe, tunnel, turnpike, main avenue, covered way (fr. SE, with a nod to the farmyard use to cover meaning copulate), love-lane, smock alley (smock in such contexts usually suggests female immorality) and the crooked way (all 19C). Cock Alley was imaginary, but a real Cock Lane (in the City) was in the 14C the only street down which London's prostitutes were licensed to ply their trade in public; the Great Fire was supposed to have stopped at its junction with Giltspur Street, while in February 1762 thousands of the curious (including Dr.

Johnson, the Duke of York and other grandees) flocked to number 33 Cock Lane to hear the scratchings and knockings of the alleged 'Cock Lane Ghost'. Modern 20C coinages add **Dead End Street**, highway, joy trail and the red lane (usually meaning throat).

## **ENTRANCE**

At the end of the road lies the front gate or entrance. Front gives front bum (cf: top bollocks\*), front door, front attic, front parlour, front window, front-gut and front garden (all 19C) while under entrance there are belly entrance and gut entrance. Allied terms include the ivory gate and Marble Arch (1850), the way-in (19C), wicket (19C), hatchway, forecaster, forecastle, fore-court, fore-hatch and fore-room and the punning Gate of Horn.

#### **NATURE**

Somewhere between the elaborate constructions of literary euphemism and the various real and fictional place-names above, are terms that relate the vagina to Nature, especially in its rural embodiment. 'Country matters', as Shakespeare nudgingly puts it in *Hamlet* III ii.

Nature itself and nature's tufted treasure are augmented by such flowers as the daisy and rose (18C, especially of virgins), the teazle (19C), the fantasy flower of chivalry (punning on chivalry: 'riding' and thus copulation), the moss rose (and its peers the mossy bank, mossy cell and mossy face, all referring to moss: pubic hair, as do Bushey Park, belly dale and belly dingle), evergreens (punning on greens\*: sexual intercourse), and the fruitful vine, which 'bears flowers [menstruation] every month'. Such a bower of bliss or beauty spot is to be found in the garden (16C) or even garden of Eden (originally a 16-17C British euphemism, now more popular among Afro-Americans), where also can be found a flower pot, a seed plot (both 19C), a shady spring and a miraculous cairn (although the logic of cairn, meaning a hill or pile, in a context of bowers and valleys, seems obscure). Beneath the clouds there may be a nettle bed,

parsley bed or gooseberry bush (all traditional euphemisms for 'where babies come from', although girls, it was claimed, came from parsley, while boys owed their origin to the posionous nettle or the spiky gooseberry, a term also used in the plural to mean testicles). Finally comes the orchard (19C) with its allied term get Jack in the orchard, meaning to have sex.

## WATER

Resolutely orientated towards the sexual aspects of the vagina, slang tends to sidestep the urinary aspects of 'down there'; nonetheless there remain a number of terms dependent on water, although whether this refers to urine, or to vaginal secretions or even to the common, if slandrous, identification of the organ with fish depends on the word or phrase in question.

Such terms include pisser (19C, also found as penis), stream's town (19C), sluice (17C), waterbox, water-gap, water-mill and water-course (all 19C) as well as fountain of love, wayside fountain and wayside ditch, damp (possibly coined by Terry Southern in Candy), pump and pump dale (17C) and duckpond. 'Fish' terms include fish (19C), tench (19C, either from the fish's name or from an abbreviation for pentitentiary, in which the penis is 'imprisoned'), trout, tuna, bit of fish, bit of skate, shell (19C), whelk, periwinckle (19C), the fish market and the free fishery, lobster pot, and Shakespeare's peculiar river (Measure for Measure I ii., with its bizarre synonym for copulation: groping for trouts in a peculiar river). The oyster and oyster-catcher, are echoed in the titles of a pair of late Victorian pornographic magazines: The Pearl and The Oyster. The bearded clam rose to popularity through the exploits of Barry Humphries' mid-1960s creation, the Australian Candide 'Barry McKenzie' (feted in the pages of Private Eye), whose efforts, when not focused on alcohol were concentrated on an endlessly unrewarded quest to 'spear' the self-same bivalve.

Ling (16C UK, 20C Australia), another fish, gives ling-grappling\* (intercourse) and works either as the vagina or as the female sexual odour. Thus the old music hall song, c. 1835, which tells the

tale of a girl attempting to buy a fish the name of which she has forgotten and runs in part: 'Then the girl shoved her hand 'neath her clothes in a shot/And rubbed it about on a certain sweet spot;/Then, blushing so sweetly, as you may suppose, she put her hand up to the fishmonger's nose./The fishmonger smelt it, and cried with delight,/.../'I'll tell you directly, you wanted some ling.'

## FOOD

While 'eating' in a sexual context usually refers to oral sex, the vagina offers a wide range of 'edible' terms. General concepts include a bit of jam, a bit of mutton, a bit of meat, a bit of pork, a bit on a fork, a bonne-bouche (fr. the French for 'pleasant taste', anglicised as 'tasty morsel') and yum yum, which can be consumed from a lunch box (20C), an oven (18C, source of the phrase a bun in the oven: pregnant) or the kitchen (1860), where the roasting jack 'turns the meat'. The equation of human flesh with metaphorical meat offers meat itself (thus meat-merchant: pimp, meat-house: brothel, flash the meat: expose oneself), and the meat market (both 16C), mutton (as vagina c. 1670; as whore, especially as laced mutton\* since 1518), bacon sandwich (20C, bacon hole, however, means mouth), the butcher's window, chopped liver (cf. chitterlings\*: penis). All these are garnished at the mustard pot (19C). The pubic hair gives another small list, including fud (originally a rabbit's tail and thus doubly sexy), furburger, fur pie, fuzzburger, hair pie (all 20C, with the last also meaning cunnilingus). Finger pie (brought into the mainstream by a Beatles' lyric) means the manual stimulation of the vagina. Secretions of whatever sort give dripping pan, gravygiver and gravy-maker (18C, gravy: 'spendings') while cut and come again was originally defined by the lexicographer John Bee as 'the meat that cries "Come eat me!". Catsmeat (19C) refers more to the use of pussy\* than to meat itself, as does the acronym PEEP (20C US, 'perfectly elegant eating pussy'). G, for goodies, may be stretched to ally it to food. Truly bizarre is fart-daniel, a 19C term meaning literally a sucking pig that is the youngest of a

litter, a term more usually written fare-daniel, and therefore possibly a misprint.

Other than meat, the vagina as food encompasses apple (a back formation from 16C apple squire\*: a pimp), a medlar (17C), a fig (19C and connected to the physical act of 'giving the fig', ie sticking one's thumb up between two forefingers), groceries and split-apricot, split fig and split mutton (all 18C). Vegetables include greens (already widely used to mean copulation and thus a pun on 'get one's greens'), a green meadow (1850), cabbage, cabbage field, cabbage garden and cabbage patch, cauliflower, mushroom (19C) and sweet potato pie (AA).

Finally a group of 'sweets' available, as it were, in the coffee-shop (more usually found meaning lavatory). They include jam (19C), cookie (US, meaning biscuit), muffin (20C), pancake, jellybag (17C), jellybox and jelly roll (20C) and jampot (19C, combining the image of a receptacle with two further definitions of jam as semen and menstrual blood). Other food receptacles are sugar basin (19C) and saltcellar from the 19C use of salt: lecherous, itself a development of its 17C meaning of copulation.

# **ANIMALS**

Last, but far from least, come those words that equate the vagina with a variety of animals, most notably with the cat. Pussy must be one of the most widespread of such terms, although it appears no earlier than the 20°C. Puss, on the other hand, dates back to the 17°C, while such variations as catty-cat, kitty, kitty-cat, chat (fr. the French chat = cat = puss) and poozle (fr. puss?) all appear in the intervening centuries. Earliest of all are malkin and roughmalkin, from 16°C Scots malkin, meaning cat; grimalkin is often the name of a witch's feline familiar, while malkin itself also means hare, suggesting a link to the rabbit, a traditionally 'sexy' animal, that may or may not be coincident.

Other animals that have been seconded to slang include the cushat (the wood pigeon or, more linguistically pertinent, the ring dove), the mink, the civet (18C), dormouse and monkey (19C US, 20C Aus). Mouse, mouser and mousetrap (all 19C) are

equally valid, as is rooster (19C: where the cock roosts). Tail remains widely popular, especially in America, where magpie's nest (18C) has become an Afro-American term. Mole-catcher reflects mole\* meaning penis, while the original use of mumble-peg (19C) was to mean mole-trap. Finally the pubic hair gives fur (18C) fluff, (19C), beaver (20C) with the porn trade jargon split beaver and pink for the wide-open vagina.

# THE PENIS

#### THE GENITALS

Before passing on to the substantial list of individual terms, all meaning penis, one should preface this section with those terms that apply not merely to the penis, but to the whole genital area, ie. the penis and testes. Underlying a good many of these is the idea of, almost literally, a tool-box, neatly packed with what one requires for sexual and procreative efficiency. Such terms include accoutrements, equipment, gear (SE since the 16C, but rendered improper by the Victorian language police and thus slang since mid-19C) and marriage gear, tackle and wedding tackle (18C), kit (19C), necessaries (20C), luggage and bag of tricks (20C). Basket was widely popular in the gay world, thus giving the pursuit of basketeering: wandering the street eyeing up the groin area of passing men; any relationship to the 18C basketmaking\* (sexual intercourse) is purely coincidental. Other terms include lady ware (19C), crown jewels and family jewels (20C, the latter being adopted by the CIA to categorize its most secret of secrets) and rig (giving the term donkey-rigged: possessed of a notably large penis). Nature (19C, also pioneer of Nature) gives the additional nature's scythe (the penis), nature's privy seal and nature's treasury (the vagina), and nature's duty (intercourse) and nature's founts (female breasts).

A number of more or less humourous terms have evolved, each describing the penis and attendant testicles: string and nuggets,

three-piece set, meat and two veg, watch and seals (19C, this also means sheep's head and pluck or viscera), and Gore Vidal's okra and prunes as created for his novel *Duluth* (1983).

A final set of terms are as euphemistic as they are slang, and while by no means restricted to the nursery, bear all the signs of the childish mentality: down there, genials, naughty bits, rude parts, and you know where. The bulk of these are equally applicable to the vagina.

## COCK, PRICK AND TOOL

Of the succession of primary slang terms for penis listed by Professor Geoffrey Hughes in his study *Swearing* (1992): **cock** (appears c.1400), while by no means the earliest coinage, has, with **tool** (1252) and **prick** (c.1592), best lasted the linguistic course and it is worth considering them as a group, before moving on to more diverse, if less instantly recognizable terms. **Weapon**, **tarse** and **limb** all appeared around the beginning of the 11C, but died out, at least in this sense, by respectively 1370, 1700 and c.1900. **Tail** also predated the survivors, appearing c.1362, but while it still plays a role in the slang lexicon —either as the buttocks, the vagina or as a generic term for women —it has not meant penis per se for some time. **Yard** (see below) also predates **cock**, **tool** and **prick**, first appearing in 1379, but it vanishes in the late 19C, and has not been in regular use for many years.

Cock comes from the Latin *cuccus*, the male domestic fowl. Thus the term has been used for any object that resembles a cock's head. As far as its use as a sexual term is concerned, cock here mixes the basic image of the cock as rooster (to use the 19C US euphemism) and the cock's head seen as a tap-like shape, this secondary aspect emphasized by its function in 'pouring' semen. Dinosaur (20C) reflects the shape of the head, while spigot (19C, with its companion spigot-sucker: fellatrix) points up the pouring aspect.

While Shakespeare, whose affection for the double entendre is almost as great as his more celebrated literary achievements, has a number of early 'cock' references in his plays, notably in *Henry VII*, i.e.: 'Pistol's cock is up and flashing fire will follow', Professor

Hughes has unearthed the early 15th century lyric, 'I have a gentle cock', which, for all that its earlier lines do appear to describe the barnyard fowl, its last verse declares with unambiguous sexuality, 'And every night he percheth him/In my lady's chamber'.

Despite the undoubted nudge-nudgery of these early uses, cock, like so many kindred terms, remained in perfectly standard use until Queen Victoria's coronation, shortly after which it joined the ranks of the taboo. It has yet to return to the mainstream. As far as its other slang uses are concerned, only as meaning 'man', and as such usually found as old cock, or as in the phrase a 'cock and bull story' (the 17C equivalent of the more recent 'shaggy dog story') is it likely to be used without at least some restraint.

Although Eric Partridge (DSUE 7th. edn.) suggests that prick is another term that started its life as SE before being dispatched to the linguistic outer darkness at the turn of the 18C, the OED, with its first citation in 1592, annotates it unequivocally as 'coarse slang'. Certainly this initial quote - 'The pissing Boye lift up his pricke.' (R. D. Hypnerotomachia) - appears coarse to modern ears, but piss\* too was still SE at the time. It should also be noted that fifty years earlier, in 1540, prick was used to denote 'a pert, forward, saucy boy or youth; a conceited young fellow'; the term is defined as 'humorous or contemptuous', but not indecent. It might have referred simply to the lad's 'sharpness', but given the synonym alongside which it appears - princock (or prime cock) - one is inclined to opt for sexuality. Whatever the truth, prick had certainly declined by 1680 when it is found in Lord Rochester's devotedly pornographic Poems on Several Occasions. Cognate are the 18C needle and wimble, which in the 13C meant a gimlet.

While cock relates the human organ to the shape and sexuality of the fowl, prick points up the penetrative function of the penis. A number of terms based on prick similarly underline the role of the vagina as its receptacle: prick-purse, prick-scourer, prick-holder and prick-skinner. Thus prick-scouring and prick-chinking both mean copulation and prick-pride an erection. The long-defunct pintle, from the Anglo-Saxon pintel and as such SE from 1100 until 1720, was another variation on the prick or pin penis model. Pintle generated a wide range of combinations

between the 17C-19C including a pintle-bit, a pintle-maid or pintle-merchant (a mistress or whore), pintle-blossom (a bubo or chancre), pintle-fever (VD in general); pintle-case (vagina), pintle-fancier or pintle-ranger (a promiscuous girl) and pintle-smith or pintle-tagger (a surgeon).

Tool, with its roots in the Old Norse word tol, meaning to prepare or to make, and its direct ancestry in the SE term for 'an instrument of manual operation', basically echoes the penetrative imagery of prick. It also takes on the function of the earlier weapon; indeed 19-20C criminals talk of tools meaning weapons, and work tooled-up when necessary.

Cock, prick and tool have survived as the leaders, as it were, of the phallic pack, but that pack is extensive, disparate and takes in terms from four centuries of linguistic development. However, there are certain identifiable areas, some of which stem from the major terms already discussed, and prior to attempting an overview of the wider list, it is possible to assess those related groupings.

## **MEMBER**

The term member, reminiscent of the defunct limb, a direct translation of the Latin membrum virile, and an abbreviation of virile or privy member, has remained SE since its first appearance in the 13C. There are, however, a number of terms that use member and which must be seen as slang, albeit of the heavily punning variety: dearest member (1740, used by Robert Burns), jolly member (19C), the member for Cockshire, (1840, with its extra pun on cock; cf. County Down\*: vagina) and master member. The unruly member (19C), however, is the tongue, a phrase based on lines 5-8 of the Epistle to St. James.

# WEAPON

'Draw thy tool; here comes two of the house of the Montagues.' warns Sampson in the first scene of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, and receives the quick response, 'My naked weapon is out'. Along with such sexually implicit armaments as instrument, sword, poll-axe, and lance, weapon, as used here, underlines Shake-

speare's affection for innuendo, and the role of the penis as a weapon remains central to the slang vocabulary, Shakespearian or otherwise. The terms engendered offer arse-opener and arse-wedge (both 19C), bush-beater and bush-whacker (20C, punning on bush\*: pubic hair; the term also means mugger), battering piece, plugtail, (17C), beard-splitter (18C, beard\*: pubic hair), hair divider, hair-splitter, cherry splitter (20C, cherry\*: maidenhead), split rump and rump-splitter. Belly-ruffian (17C), dong and ding-dong, while not weapons as such, are undoubtedly aggressive terms. A bow shoots arrows (presumably of desire), although the term may refer to the sawing motion of the fiddler's bow; cf. fiddle\*: vagina. Finally quimstake and quimwedge (and the abbreviated wedge) play on the 17C term quim: vagina and are as such cognate with the Celtic cym and thus, like so many such terms, with the ur-slang synonym: cunt. More 20C terms include chopper (which had an earlier life meaning tail, which, with nice circularity, means both penis and vagina), swack, swipe, twanger, wang, wanger, wang-tang and whammer. Helmet (sometimes as German helmet, presumably of the World War I vintage, adorned with its spike or pickelhube), while undoubtedly part of one's armoury in standard English, and meaning glans in slang, is only a marginal contender in this section.

While the following terms too are not weapons as such, they all denote a degree of aggression. The woman, in these cases, is always on the receiving end, and pleasure, if it exists, is purely coincident: among them are eye opener, girl-catcher, girlometer (1870), leather stretcher and leather dresser, (19C, leather\*: vagina), trouble-giblets, tickle-gizzard, tickle-toby, tickle-tail, tickle faggot, tickle thomas, and bum-tickler. The Northern dialect pillock (sometimes known as pillicock or pillicock pistol—like prick and dick also used as a pejorative) dates back to the 14C (thus pillicock hill: vagina). The placket-racket (17C) uses placket to mean woman and thus, objectified, vagina; the penis as racket 'hits' her. Enemy may be purely literary; its implication is also quite unequivocal.

#### KNIFE AND DAGGER

Aside from the general weapons above, and echoic of the stabbing implications of prick, there are several terms based on a sword, knife or dagger. They include dagger itself, dard (meaning dart), love-dart, lance of love, dirk (18C), bayonet (19C), blade, bodkin (fr. SE:dagger), butter-knife (butter\*: semen), bracmard (17C, a short broad sword, from the French braquemard), pike and pikestaff (18C), cutlass, culty-gun and cutty gun, (19C, all from the Latin cultellus: knife), and the contemporary trio: pork sword, beef bayonet and mutton dagger.

#### **GUN**

'This is my rifle, this is my gun,' chant the hapless recruits drilling in America's boot camps, their M-16 clasped in one hand, their penis in the other, 'this is for fighting, this is for fun'. The penis as pistol, confirming feminism's most pessimistic stereotyping, has a venerable history: not for nothing is Shakespeare's braggart soldier, cited at cock above, named Pistol. Later sexual hardware includes bazooka (originally an anti-tank rocket launcher, first used in World War II), cannon, gun, and the Afro-American peacemaker, a term that springs either from the nickname of the Wild West's legendary Colt .45 revolver, or, just possibly, from the ironic nickname accorded the nuclear arsenal's MX missile.

# STICK

The shape of the penis, as well as its function, gives stick, blow stick, gutstick, fuckstick (20°C), drumstick (19°C) and shitstick. Similar terms include prod, prong, ramrod, reamer, rod, wand, pipe (20°C, thus to lay some pipe: to have intercourse), pole (19°C, thus the US campus slang for sex education courses: holes and poles), tube, (19°C) pile-driver, (19°C) pilgrim's staff (18°C), sceptre, spindle (19°C), staff of life (19°C, punning on the phrase's usual meaning, coined in 1638, of bread or any other staple food) shove-straight, spike-faggot (fr. the 17°C use of faggot: woman), wood, tentpeg, rolling-pin, roly-poly, ploughshare and dib-

ble (fr. the gardening implement, a dibbler). Copper-stick and coral branch both refer as much to the organ's colour as its shape, as does rubigo (a Scots term of the 16C, possibly from the Latin ruber meaning red). The implication of gigglestick (technically US rhy. sl.), joystick and joy prong (all 20C) is more of pleasure than of pain and the wriggling stick or pole (18C, thus to wriggle navels\*: to have intercourse) is presumably as pleasurable as it is merely penetrative. Broom-handle and clothes-prop (both of which imply the erect organ) must be listed with the 'sticks'. Similar implements are the gulley raker and kennel raker (19C, also applied to the man who does the 'raking') and the handstaff (19C, from that part of a flail that is held in the hands). Less obvious is langolee, which Partridge surmises as being from the Welsh trangluni, meaning tools. Yard, one of the earliest slang words for penis, is rooted in a variety of terms, typically the Old Teutonic gazdjo, all of which mean a thin pole; the word is also possibly linked to the Latin hasta, meaning spear, and even to the Italian cazzo, also slang for penis. Certainly the 17C gadso and catso are borrowings from the Italian original and like a number of similar terms mean both penis and rogue or villain.

Alongside these 'stick' terms are a variety of 'clubs'. These include hammer, bludgeon, club, claw-buttock, pestle (which in other contexts meant a constable's staff, although it is found here as the logical opposite of mortar, meaning vagina), life preserver (a form of truncheon or sap) and billy (either from the mid-19C billy\*: truncheon or a pun on the billycock\* hat). The sensitive truncheon (19C) is more usually found meaning the human nose.

# HUNTER

Finally come those terms which anthropomorphise the penis as a hunter. Among them are cunny-catcher, punning on the 16C coney-catcher\*, a conman, itself punning on coney: a rabbit, Nimrod (19C: the 'mighty hunter' of Genesis with an additional punning nod towards rod), crack-hunter, cranny-haunter and cracksman (all 19C) and hunter itself.

#### FOOD

The image of the penis as food – either as a sweet or, with the obvious inference of the masculine attributes of the bull as meat gives rise to more terms. The first category includes yum-yum (19C, also the vagina), sweetmeat, sugarstick (18C, and the logical opposite of sugar basin\*: vagina), lollipop or ladies' lollipop (19C), tummy banana (20C), lunch (20C) and pud (thus to pull one's pud\*: to masturbate). As well as the pork sword, the beef bayonet and the mutton dagger (above) meat terms include the simple meat itself (16C, thus a bit of meat\*: intercourse), as well as beef (19C, to do or have a bit of beef\* is for a woman to have sex), hambone, tubesteak (20C), white meat and dark meat (20C, depending on race), sausage and live sausage (19C), butcher (thus the butcher's shop: the vagina), goose's neck and gooser (both 1870s) and turkey neck (20C, particularly favoured by the writer Charles Bukowski, but also used, albeit as a simile, by Sylvia Plath in The Bell Jar [1971]). The idea of a meat cleaver implies that here the vagina, rather than the penis, is the flesh in question. Schnitzel and schnickel come from the German, meaning a veal cutlet and usually found since the mid-19C as the Wiener (Viennese) schnitzel, coated with egg and breadcrumbs, fried and often garnished with lemon, capers, anchovies. Finally there is the crimson chitterling; chitterlings being the small intestines of animals, especially pigs. It may simply be coincidence that the one country house to be named in the 19C pornographic novel The Modern Eveline (c.1840) is called Chitterlings. More carnal treats come in marrowbone, marrowbone and cleaver and marrow-pudding (all 19C).

Still in the realm of the edible, we have the creamstick (19C), although the cream in question is semen, and its modern successor, the ice cream machine, as well as goober (US: peanut) and bean and bean-tosser (19C, presumably from the shape). Gristle, while usually inedible, falls into this section. Among Shakespeare's many euphemisms for penis is the poperin or poperine pear, which in this case lends its shape to the phallic synonym. The 'poperin' in question is the town of Poperinghe, in west Flanders. It comes in

Romeo and Juliet, that repository of so much innuendo. 'O Romeo, that she were/An open et-caetera/thou a poperin pear! 'says Mercutio. Indeed the term may even, as Eric Partridge suggests in Shakespeare's Bawdy (1947) offer a second level of doublespeak, with poperin punning on 'pop her in'. Et-caetera\* is of course a literary euphemism for vagina. Jargonelle, an early ripening brand of pear, is another linguistic penis-substitute. It appeared in the 18C and was originally limited to what gardeners condemned as a second-rate variety; it may be pure coincidence that in French the fruit is known as Cuisse Madame or lady's thigh.

#### RHYMING SLANG

Rhyming slang terms for penis include almond (19C, from almond rock, although the plural almond rocks\* means socks) and dickory dock (19C); the Irish colleen bawn (19C, lit. 'the fair girl') and Marquis of Lorne (20C, both horn), Uncle Dick (20C, prick, although it also means sick, thus giving dicky\* as in dicky ticker: a weak heart), mad Mick (Australian), Pat and Mick, stormy Dick (US), Hampton rock (cock) and Hampton Wick (19C prick) a term that underlies the period joke, as recorded by Julian Franklyn in his Dictionary of Rhyming Slang (1960), concerning the young woman who claimed that her flat had been furnished by Waring and Gillows when in fact all her luxuries had been provided by Hamptons. Why, as Franklyn asks, East End Cockneys should opt for an outer London suburb rather than the adjacent Hackney Wick as the basis for the term remains unknown. The backslang enob means bone.

# **NAMES**

Pet names for the genitals abound – they are not even attempted here. Nonetheless the penis has attracted a number of proper names, all of which can be categorised as general slang rather than bedroom intimacy. Perhaps the most obvious, even if one usually forgets that it is a name, is **dick**, the use of which is almost as widespread as **cock** or **prick**. The term emerged from the British Army around 1880, and presumably is a variation on the once

equally popular John Thomas, although some authorities see it as yet another development of dirk\*. The term soon passed into general use, although one should note World War I's cynical translation of the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) as 'dick shot off'. Perhaps the most celebrated occurrence of John Thomas, whose variants include man Thomas, Tommy, Master John Thursday, Master John Goodfellow, Julius Caesar (19C) and Jack Robinson, is in D. H. Lawrence's once taboo novel Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928), with its bucolic couplings of 'John Thomas' and 'Lady Jane'. The term originated c.1840 and remains in use, albeit somewhat self-consciously; the abbreviation JT is also popular. Its alternative meaning, that of servant, barely survived the turn of this century. John Willie is a similar term, which was taken up as a pseudonym by one of this century's most famous and soughtafter illustrators of bondage and discipline pornography.

Other names include Jacob, (19C, a reference to the Biblical Jacob's ladder—up which one climbs), Jack in the box, (19C, which pops up), Captain Standish, (18C, who 'stands erect', and ranks among a number of contemporary' Captains' including Captain Hackum\*: a thug, Captain Cheat: a card sharp and several more), Don Cypriano, (17C, used by Sir Thomas Urquhart in his translation of Rabelais, a work which included a wide variety of new, if literary, slang coinages), Jezabel (19C), Dr Johnson, (18C; possibly on the model of John Thomas, although Partridge suggests 'there was no-one Dr Johnson was not prepared to stand up to'). The US use of Johnson for penis is unlikely to stem from the great lexicographer but relates, more probably, to the boxer Jack Johnson (if any individual is involved), or simply as a development of such terms as jock\* or jack\*.

Little Davy and Master Reynard (the latter usually representing the fox) are both 19C, as is Nebuchadnezzar (19C, from the Babylonian monarch's reputed appetite for grass, and thus greens\*: sexual intercourse). Old Blind Bob (19C), old Horney and old Hornington (18C) and old Rowley (which also means the devil) convey a certain affectionate tone. Old Slimey is merely descriptive. Peter and Robin (the pet name for a servant's penis in The Modern Eveline) are linked to John Thomas; St Peter 'keeps

the keys of Paradise' while Sir Martin Wagstaffe 'wags his staff', Roger (1650) also means to have intercourse, and a century later the name was one regularly given to bulls. Finally come the essentially alliterative Percy (best-known in the Australian phrase for urination, point percy at the porcelain\*, although also used as the title of a deeply embarrassing film of the Sixties), while Polyphemus (19C) is taken from Homer's Odyssey, where he is a Cyclops, distinguished by his single eye and thus a distant relation to the modern one-eyed trouser snake and one-eyed brother. The bald-headed hermit (19C) bears a similar implication.

As well as these proper names the penis has been variously personified as an old man (19C), customs officer (he exacts his 'duty' on 'entering'), milkman (although this usually implies a masturbator), rector of the females, (17C) ranger (18C) and solicitor general (presumably a pun on SE solicit) and vestryman (the vestry being positioned at the entrance\* of the church).

#### **NURSERY TERMS**

The terms used either to or amongst children to describe the penis are, by their nature, euphemistic, but they have also entered the slang lexicon. They include **peenie**, **weenie** and **wienie** (US, from the similar term meaning sausage, and known in Britain's delicatessens as a Vienna), willy (the almost universal term of choice in today's schools, and thus today's homes), winkle and winky (the second of which implies the 'one-eye' of the urethra), doodle, (18C), peewee (19C) and tinkle (a term similarly used for urination). Dicky (1870) is the child's diminutive of dick.

# **GENERAL TERMS**

There are many other terms for penis, a wide selection of which follows. They come in no particular order, and unlike those above often defy obvious structure; such links as do exist will be noted.

For instance the physical aspects of copulation give jigger, (originally meaning key but also vagina), while jig-a-jig\* means copulation), do-jigger, jiggling bone (19C), and driving post, while the shape of the flaccid penis gives flip-flap (1650), flapper,

flapdoodle (17C), floater (19C), crank (20C), derrick (a crane) dangler (19C, cf. danglers: testicles), dingle-dangle (19C), pendulum, (19C, which swings back and forth) and dingaling (best known in rock 'n' roller Chuck Berry's song 'My Dingaling'). The idea of the penis burrowing into some dark tunnel gives maggot, ferret, (thus ferreting: copulation), chutney ferret (20C, usually in the context of sodomy) and mole (which wanders around in the dark, although a mole was for a time a promiscuous girl although this may well be a variation on moll\*, and as such related to another unlikely term, doll, also more usually meaning a girl) plus its dialect cousin mouldiworp (literally 'earth-thrower' and almost universal amongst the UK regions), cunny-burrow and cunny-burrow ferret, and mouse (19C). The basic physical connection of sexual intercourse also offers joint; the Northern dialect tadger or todger may also have a similar meaning, if it comes, as some have claimed, from the term tadge, meaning to join. Nag and bob-my-nag (17C) both trade on the meaning of nag as horse, and thus 'ride' and thus sexual congress.

Music offers blue-veined piccolo, blue-veined trumpet and indeed blue-veined steak, as well as the flute (18/19C), best known as the skin flute, the living flute or the silent flute. Fiddle-bow may have musical overtones, but fiddle here means vagina, as in the cognate fiddle-diddle (19C), where diddle means sexual intercourse; similarly whore-pipe is not something one plays upon, but simply inserts. Less tuneful, but loosely related to the 'blue veins', are Bluebeard (fr. the children's story, and Henri Landru, France's real-life seducer and serial killer who ended his days on the guillotine) and Blueskin (otherwise meaning mulatto and best-known as the nickname of an 18C villain).

Engine, much beloved of John Cleland (1709-89), whose Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (1748-49), better known as Fanny Hill (itself quite possibly a reference to fanny\*: vagina, and hill with its implication of 'mounting') is celebrated for its being the only major pornographic novel to have achieved its effects without the use of obscene language (which has never, however, preserved it from being censored for obscenity), has generated a number of allied terms. Among them are machine (19C) and love machine (20C),

fornicating engine, fornicating tool, fornicator and fornicating member (19C), garden engine and gardener (19C, from garden\*: vagina), gaying instrument, (19C, gay: sexually active) and generation tool (19C, generating place: vagina). Tool itself, of course, falls into this category. The size of such engines gives the modest inch (properly from its function of 'inching in'), the boastful nine-inch knocker, and four-elevenforty-four, an Afro-American term that refers to supposed dimensions of four inches in circumference and eleven long. The Yiddish schlong, from the German schlange: snake) and popularised in Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint (1969) has a certain onomatopoeic heft, while kidney wiper, given human anatomy, presumes impressive length. The unqualified knocker relates to the vagina as a door, as do key (18C), picklock (17C) and knock Andrew (though this is more likely a misprint of nockandro\*: the buttocks). Chink-stopper and gap-stopper are self-evident. Skyscraper (19C) comes from the name for the topmost sails on a large sailing boat.

Slang terms for penis can often be used as pejoratives: prick is an obvious example. Others include dork, plonker (massively popularized by the BBC-TV series Only Fools and Horses), schmuck and putz (both Yiddish and nearly always found as putdowns, although the former is somewhat more affectionate), yoyo (20C) and the allied dorkbrain and dickhead, based on dick. However in the case of fool sticker and fool maker (both 19C) the 'fool' is presumably a cuckolded husband.

Nature is represented in stalk, tail\*, root, man root, old root and Irish root (1830); Irish toothache means an erection. Such terms should also include bog bamboo, sensitive plant, acorn (fr. which great oaks grow) and arm (notably apostrophised in the comedian Lenny Bruce's description of a large penis as 'a baby's arm with an apple in its fist'). The animal kingdom offers worm, hog, bird, big bird, beak, white owl, cuckoo (possibly an amplification of cock), rabbit (fr. the species' allegedly non-stop copulations) and strunt (1608, in SE the fleshy part of animal's tail), while human anatomy has thumb of love, stump, big foot Joe, third leg, middle leg and best leg of three (19C). An alternative

version since World War I has been **short arm**, often found as 'short-arm inspection', the military inspection of the genitals for VD. **Pizzle** meant the animal penis until c.1520, when it became slang for the human variety. The etymologically puzzling **tallywag** (18C, plus **tallywagger**, **tallywhacker** and **tallywock**) may be related to **tail**, but the original tally was a notched stick, and that connection too would not be impossible. **Pecker**, if it is related as some suggest to SE *beak*, should be ranked in this section as should its derivative **pecnoster**, (a pun on **pecker** and *paternoster*).

Horn has meant sexual excitement as much as it has the penis in which it is generated, since the 18C; like honker it can also mean nose. The use of horns in a variety of phrases meaning cuckold, especially to wear the horns, while logically related to the horn as penis, apparently comes from an old German farming practice of grafting the spurs of a castrated cock on the root of the severed comb. These transplants would grow into horns, sometimes several inches long. The German word hahnreh or hahnrei, meaning cuckold, originally meant capon, a castrated cock.

Euphemistic terms, especially popular in literary use, include Aaron's Rod and Adam's Arsenal, Father Abraham, fatherof-all and father confessor (thus the confessional: the vagina), the old Adam (19C, a standard English term for original sin), arbor vitae (18C, from the Latin meaning tree of life), athenaeum, (early 20C, from its original meaning: a group of persons meeting together for mutual improvement), my body's captain, (coined by the US writer Walt Whitman) and Cupid's torch (possibly lighting the corridors of the Cupid's Arms or Cupid's Hotel: the vagina). The best example is probably pego (18C), supposedly from the Greek pege meaning spring or fountain. Other terms include trifle, toy, ware, knack and piece (usually found as meaning woman). Even more euphemistic are those terms which fail even to identify the object in question. These include it (19C. although it is more widely found meaning vagina) dingus, doover (fr. doofah, meaning gadget or thingummy), that, the Lord knows what (17C), what Harry gave Doll and what's its name. Affair and concern (c.1840) are both suitably vague. Privates and private property (both 19C) epitomize these evasions.

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While so many terms concentrate on the aggressive image of the penis, some are less devotedly macho, even if the point of view is still that of the man. Such terms include partner, matrimonial peacemaker (19C), the wife's best friend (20C), usually found in the phrase 'shake hands with...', meaning urinate), good time (as in 'I'll give you a good time...', although the traditional whore's come-on – 'Fancy a good time...'—obviously bears other interpretations), ladies' delight, ladies' plaything and ladies' treasure, merrymaker (19C), and master of ceremonies. Lullaby, which 'puts one to sleep', and lamp of light may be numbered amongst these gentler images. The procreative aspects of the penis are almost wholly subsumed in the sexual ones, but child-getter, baby maker and brat-getter (all 19C), pay the function at least a modicum of lip-service.

Finally in this lengthy selection are those terms that defy categorisation of any sort. Jock, (18C, and for the next century used to describe the female genitals as well) comes from the otherwise obscure cant term jockum, cited by Harman in his Caveat as meaning penis. Thus jockum-cloy meant to have intercourse and a jock-gagger was a man living upon the earnings of a prostitute. Other discrete terms include end (as in 'get your end away'), rudder and sternpost (combining the SE meaning of end —in this case of a boat — with the protruberant aspects of the penis), ID (fr. SE identification, as in 'let's see your ID'), string and wire (20C, thus to pull one's wire\*: to masturbate), jammy (20C, mainly found in the lyrics of rap music and on the streets that produce them), woofer, yang, ying-yang and yutz.

## ERECTIONS, IMPOTENCE, SIZE AND CIRCUMCISION

Terms for the erect penis, other than those incidentally cited above, include Bethlehem steel (US) and Britannia metal (UK), blue vein, bone, and boner, prong, scope, cockstand (18C) and stand (19C), horn (see above), the stiff deity, stiff and stout, jack, hard-on, bit of hard and hard-bit, fixed bayonet, the old Adam, lance in rest, spike and stiffie (20C). The partially erect penis is the lob or lazy lob, while an impotent organ is an Irish

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horse, a dropping member, muddy waters (AA) or Hanging Johnny (especially if suffering a venereal disease as well) and a dead rabbit (fr. rabbit). The brewer's droop refers to impotence through an excess of alcohol, while to be piss proud is to have an early morning erection. To achieve an erection is to get a hard-on, get a stand and so on, as well as to be in one's Sunday best, the Aus. crack a fat and the 19C bring up by hand.

Given male worries about such dimensions, there exist a number of terms for the large and small penis — although given the prevalence of those worries, perhaps there should be more. The small penis can be an IBM (not the computer firm but 'itty bitty meat') or a puppy; a stringbean is thin; large penises are donkey-dicks, and those who have them are donkey-rigged, hung, well-hung or donkey-dicked. If the penis is larger at the top than at the base it is bell-topped or bell-swagged and rantallion, according to Francis Grose describes 'one whose scrotum is relaxed as to be longer than his penis'.

As most British schoolboys learn, a circumcised penis is a roundhead, while its uncircumcised cousin is a cavalier. There are other terms, especially for circumcision, many of which, unsurprisingly, feature 'Jewish' references. Among these are the Jewish compliment (also found as 'a large penis and no money'), Jewish corned beef (US, salt beef in Britain), Jewish National (the reference is to America's Hebrew National brand of kosher salami), Jew's lance and kosher dill. Non-Jewish terms are the one-eyed boy with his shirtsleeves rolled up and a low neck and short sleeves; a circumcised penis has been clipped. The foreskin is lace curtains or a snapper; the uncircumcised penis is blind or near-sighted and known, at least in gay use, as Canadian bacon.

## **TESTICLES**

Of the best-known terms for the testicles, three had a lengthy career as SE until the constraints of Victorian English consigned them to the world of slang. **Ballocks** (now more generally **bollocks**) dates from 11 C SE, **stones** from the 12 C and **cods** (later **cobs**) (initially meaning the scrotum) from the 14 C. They are followed by the 16 C

culls or cullions (both from the French couillons: testicles) and the 17C jelly-bag (also the vagina), nutmegs, and pounders. Nicknacks is 18C (cf. nick-nack: vagina), as is nuts (and its 19C successors nerds and nerts); baubles and bawbels (18C, although Shakespeare uses bauble as the penis itself) and bobbies and bobbles (19C) see the testes as items of jewellery, and thus prefigure the 19C trinkets and the modern family jewels. The 19C has **balls**, perhaps the best-known of all such synonyms, plus bum-balls and cannonballs, knackers (fr. northern dialect use), eggs in the basket, pills, clock-weights, bullets, marbles and pebbles, seals (which 'seal' a sexual bargain) and love-apples. Thingumibobs is euphemistic and reminiscent of the 17C whiblin (the term vanishes after 1652), which also means thingumibob, but is defined by Farmer and Henley as a eunuch. Dowsetts play on the 17C SE: deer's testicles, while goolies was imported via the Indian army, whose soldiers drew on the Hindi goli: a bullet, ball, or pill. The 19C also has the rhy. sl. tommy rollocks (ballocks) and Niagara Falls plus the backslang slabs; 20C rhymes include flowers and frolics (ballocks) and orchestra stalls. Other 20C terms include rocks (as in get one's rocks off\*), sack o'nuts. grand bag, frick and frack (20C AA) and the Spanish cojones, much celebrated in Ernest Hemingway's tales of macho derringdo. To be castrated is to be two stone under weight or two stone wanting (18C), unpaved or stoned.

# THE POSTERIOR

Among those words categorised as 'Anglo-Saxon' the basic slang term for the posteriors, backside or 'rear end', arse can rightly claim pride of place. Whether spelt a-r-s-e, or, as in America a-s-s (possibly a tribute, albeit subconscious, to lexicographer Noah Webster's 19C attempts to simplify English spelling) the term can be found in Old High German, Old Norse. and a variety of other Teutonic and Scandinavian languages. Its nearest relation is the German arsch.

Indeed the term goes back even further, with definite links to the Greek orros and orsos. In English it dates easily back to 1000 when it is spelt ars, ears or ars; the modern version appears around 300 years later. It should be noted, however, that despite the prevalence of the arse spelling in Britain, Shakespeare opts for ass, often in a punning context, on several occasions.

Like many similar terms, arse did not begin life as slang: until c.1660 it was quite respectable, but henceforth it entered the realms of the taboo, to be resisted in polite conversation and printed only after the exclusion of crucial consonants, typically by Francis Grose in his Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (3 edn. 1796), who prefers 'a--e' to the fullblown word. It remained off-limits, at least in print, until 1930, when Frederic Manning earned himself a good deal of notoriety for spelling it out in his memoir of World War I, Her Privates We. Since then the word has become decreasingly terrifying, and combinations such as arse about, or can't tell one's arse from one's elbow, while yet to join standard English, can reasonably be considered as colloquialisms, rather than hard-core slang. That said, arse/ass, remains one of those 'filthy words' cited in 1978 by the US Federal Communications Commission as indecent, if not actually obscene.

## THE ANUS

The basic term for anus remains arse- or asshole (18/19C) and it is the 'hole' element that provides a number of terms, notably bunghole, cornhole (20C, thus cornholing: sodomy), porthole (17C), ring (19C), quoit (Aus. 1920s), round mouth (1810, sometimes as Brother Round Mouth, whose 'speech', of course, is a fart, as is that of the backdoor trumpet), roundeye and the somewhat arch monocular eyeglass (1860). The same 'eye' is responsible for backeye (plus backslice and backslit) as well as deadeye and blind eye, while the shape offers a couple of fruits—medlar (17C) and date (20C, both Aus. and market traders)—as well as freckle and blot (Aus. 1930). The defecatory function of the anus is seen in terms going back to Chaucer, where tewel or tuel meant literally a pipe. More recently the image persists in

the 20C dirt chute, poop chute, shit chute and shitter, as well as the 'travelling' implications of the dirt road, the tan track and the Hershey highway (Hershey bars being America's most popular chocolate). The brown-eye and brownie refer to the excrement itself, as does the earlier American Brunswick (although this may have some relation to heinie, meaning buttocks and similarly rooted in a German name).

The hollowness of the anus also produces gazoo and kazoo, both of which are probably rooted in keister or keester. This 19C US term also means the back pocket of a pair of trousers, a safe, and the suitcase carried by street salesmen, from which they display their wares. Satchel, meaning anus, is a logical extension.

Extending from hole to notch, one finds nock (18C) and the 17C nockandro (1611, possibly from notch plus the Greek andros, meaning man). The modern Afro-American gripples is rooted in the 15C when SE gripple meant a small ditch or trench, itself stemming from the 11C grip, meaning the same thing. Given its function, and slang's inevitable earthiness, there are also references to the smell, typically spice island (1810), winker-stinker, stank and stench-trench (all 20C) and Roby Douglas, an 18C reference to a hapless individual of that name, blessed with 'one eye and a stinking breath'. Windmill and windward passage both refer to unpleasant odours. Finally, of no particular grouping, are trill (possibly a pun on the Latin ars musica), jacksie (19C, probably from jacksy-pardy, also meaning anus), dinger (Aus. 1935, from ring or perhaps dung) and nancy. This last is usually found in the rudely dismissive phrase 'ask my nancy'; its relation to the same word when meaning homosexual is unproven, although they both appear around 1810.

## THE BUTTOCKS

What arsehole is to anus, so is bum to buttocks. Despite popular belief, bum is not an abbreviation of bottom, but an onomatopoeic term, echoic of the smack of one's backside hitting a flat surface, and as such coined as early as 1387. The word is also allied to a variety of terms meaning protruberance or swelling, typically bump.

The actual abbreviation is BTM, essentially a children's euphemism. Arse itself is responsible for a variety of rhy. sl., notably bottle and glass, khyber pass, and the particularly complex arris (Aristotle = bottle = bottle and glass = arse); other rhymes include Daily Mail (tail), North Pole and Elephant and Castle (both arsehole). Buttocks gives butt, the Afro-American butter and booty and the West Indian batti. Kab edis is backslang for backside while double juggs, has a satisfying onomatopoeia.

The shape of the buttocks offers cheeks, blind cheeks, two fat cheeks and ne'er a nose, and blind Cupid. Ampersand has the requisite curves but properly recalls the fact that in late 19C nursery alphabets the symbol '&' was usually printed after the twenty-six letters. Juff (possibly from the French joues: cheeks) carries on the image, as does chuff (Aus. then UK 20C) and duff.

The protruberant aspect of the buttocks offers jutland, keel, stern and poop (both referring to the rear end of a ship, although the latter has been co-opted as a nursery term for excrement), caboose (19C from the rear part of first a coach and then a railway train), and tail (standard English from 14C to 1750, thereafter more colloquial than slang, and currently more American than British). The 'seating' function of the buttocks creates the obvious seat, sit-me-down, sit-upon and squatter, as well as parking place (20C, reminiscent of the US radio comedian Harry Parke [1904-58] who worked under the stage name of 'Parkyakarkus'). Similar in position is dummock (19C, possibly from the Romany term for 'back'), as are the seats of honour, of shame and of vengeance (all 19C).

From Yiddish comes tochus (variously spelt as tokhes, tokkus, toches and even tush — they all stem from a Hebrew word meaning 'under' or 'beneath'). German offers heinie (stemming from the World War I nickname for the German enemy and based on Heinrich), while Spanish gives culo. The gay community is credited with Dutch dumplings, English muffins and the Greek side.

Other random terms include **prat** (cited in Harman's *Caveat* in 1567, and still the basis of show business' 'prat-fall'), **fun** (17C, from fundament), **dopey** (18C, originally a beggar's doxy), **droddum** 

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(19C), corybungo (19C, initially prize-fighters' jargon), fanny (US 1920, but used in Britain to mean vagina from at least 1860), Sunday face (19C), Westphalia (19C, a pun on Westphalia ham), feak (19C, possibly from feague: to thrash), gooseberry grinder (19C, often in the phrase 'ask Bogey the gooseberry grinder', a euphemism for 'ask my arse') and can (20C, also used widely to mean lavatory).

# DEFECATION

#### **EXCREMENT**

Three words dominate the excretory lexicon: in order of entry into the language they are **turd**, **crap**, and **shit**, the first two of which emphasize the way that excrement is detached from the body, while the third concentrates on the idea of excrement as waste.

Unlike so many so-called 'Anglo-Saxon' words, turd does have a real claim to the title, stemming as it does from the old English tord, and indeed beyond that to an Indo-European root that means tear or split. Emerging into popular use around 1000, and as yet merely descriptive of a common bodily product, turd became a pejorative around 1250. By the time of Harman's Caveat (1567) his translation of the cant phrase 'Gerry gan the Ruffian cly thee' is 'A torde in thy mouth, the deuill take thee'. Gerry is literally jere, itself meaning turd. The phrase continues, appearing typically in Ben Jonson's Bartholemew Fair (1614) and elsewhere. Despite the obvious coarseness of such terms, the word, in common with many other once acceptable, if not wholly respectable words, did not become slang until the mid-18C. Unlike his predecessor Harman Frances Grose could no longer spell the word out: in his slang dictionary of 1785 it has become T—D. It has stayed off-limits ever since, although like many of what are considered as the 'milder' obscenities, it has crept gradually into spoken, if not written English, especially as where, like its cognate shit, it refers not to excrement, but to a human object of derision or dislike.

Like turd crap, with its connection to the Dutch krappen – to pluck off, cut off or separate – underlines the way excrement is cut off from the body. However, like shit, it also introduces an element of waste or rejected matter, notably in its links to the Old French crappe: siftings, particularly 'the grain trodden under feet in the barn, and mingled with the straw and dust', itself drawn from the medieval Latin crappa and crapinum – the smaller chaff. The modern French crape maintains the idea of waste, although it literally translates as 'dirt' and 'filth'. The chaff meaning appears in English c.1440; crap meant money to the 18C and the gallows to the early 19th, but the excretory aspects waited four centuries from that first use, before crap finally meant to evacuate. Crap as a noun waited even longer: the first citation the OED can produce is remarkably late, in 1898 and attributed to its appearance in Joseph Wright's English Dialect Dictionary.

The last of the base trio, **shit** abandons the idea of separation and concentrates fully on the waste aspects of excrement. Its roots lie in the Old English *scite* and the Middle Low German *schite*, both meaning dung, and in the modification *scitte*, also OE, meaning diarrhoea. A final form, **shite**, emerged in the 19C, but remains relatively rare, usually found in dialect and often put into the mouth of those a writer is attempting to portray as Irish. Like **turd shit** emerges early into English, the noun and verb appearing in the early 14C. As a putdown it is already popular around 1500 and by 1598 Florio, in the *Worlde of Wordes*, is comparing a 'shitten fellow' with a 'goodman turd'. By the 18C, after four hundred years of acceptance by the mainstream, **shit** joined the slang lexicon, and subsequent citations for its use, from the 18C to around thirty years ago, are careful to insert judicious hyphens when printing it.

There are many other terms. Given the importance of excrement in the juvenile mind, a number of them, which persist into many adult vocabularies, stem from the euphemisms of one's earliest years. Among them are big jobs (fr. the Scottish jobby), number twos, poo, poop and poopie-plops, diddley poo, dookey, dukie, kak, ca-ca, yackum, do (especially as applied to animals, e.g. doggy do) and doo-doo. Most if not all of these appear in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Earlier terms return us to the adult vocabulary. Defining turd, Grose cites sir-reverence (also save-reverence), which began life in the 14C as a formal phrase meaning 'begging your pardon' and which by the late 16C had taken on this euphemistic secondary meaning. It is thus the basis of a later, 20C euphemism for visiting the lavatory: to 'excuse oneself' and the schoolchild's cry of 'Can I be excused?' Scumber or scummer comes from the dialect for animal dung or sticky, viscous mud, clart (coined in 1808 as sticky mud, and often found, notably in the 1970s television series *Porridge* as 'in the clarts', an obvious euphemism for 'shits'), while in the 17C a tantoblin or tantoblin tart was not just a turd, but also a round sweet tart.

More recent terms include the Australian crash, honey (as in the honey-carts that drain off the sewage tanks of airplanes and railway trains), the alley apple (in the animal kingdom the road apple), body wax, scharn, sozzle, taunty, and the abbreviation BM, meaning bowel movement. Defectation of all types is particularly productive of rhyming slang, as will be seen below, doubtless through a perceived need for euphemism. Terms for excrement include big hit (Australian) and tomtit (both shit), pony (pony and trap) and horse and trap (both crap), lemon (lemon curd) and Richard (the Third) (both meaning turd).

Other excrement-related terms are dags (Aus.), clinkers and dingleberries (presumably from SE dangle), all meaning the excrement that adheres to a badly cleaned rectum (in the case of dags also, in Aus., to a sheep), and skid marks (stains on one's underwear). The sewers of the 17C produced two terms: Gravesend sweetmeats (solid lumps of sewage; by the 19C the term meant shrimps) and jere-peck (a sewer: jere meaning turd, peck a heap).

## DIARRHOEA

Given the relative consequences of the two states — constipation may be painful, but it is diarrhoea that may be actively and publicly embarrassing—it is the latter condition that has attracted a far wider range of slang. Indeed constipation offers only the anti-clerical quaker (18C, a hard, and possibly lengthy piece of excreta; thus

bury a quaker: to defecate), plus its rhy. sl. synonym, the 19C muffin baker, which brings the comment, when the desire, but not the facility for defecation is on hand, 'Better let it bake.' To be constipated is to be hard-baked (19C) or bunged up.

Diarrhoea, on the other hand, is infinitely more productive. Runs, scoots, trots, the backdoor trot, movies, jerry-go-nimble (19C, like the 16C gurry, from jere), thorough-go-nimble (17C, also meaning inferior beer, presumably from its deleterious affects on the gut) and wherry go nimble (20C, possibly from 'where he go') all attest to the urgency of finding a lavatory when thus afflicted, while squitters and collywobbles describe the problems of those who are loose in the hilt (19C), as does the painful ringburner (20C). The key term is shits, with its rhyming slang alternatives toms (tomtits) and Jimmy Britts (both Australian), and threepenny bits.

The experiences of British and Americans troops in the last World War, magnified by the onset of mass tourism, with its concomitant culinary xenophobia, has created a whole sub-group of terms to describe the diarrhoea picked up by these first contacts with exotic menus. Described generally as the touristas or, crudely, as wog gut, these afflictions, depending on geography, have been named variously as the Aztec twostep, Cairo crud, Delhi belly, GIs, Gyppy tummy, Hong Kong dog, Montezuma's revenge and Rangoon runs.

## TO DEFECATE

The actual act of defecation naturally uses a number of the terms above — take a crap, take a shit — as well as those for visiting a lavatory — go to the dunnee, go to see one's aunt, visit the crapping casa, etc. — (for which see LAVATORY below), but there are some extra words and phrases. Among them are powder one's nose, cramber, take a dump, choke a darkie (Aus.), post a letter, go and sing 'sweet violets', take an Irish shave, sit on the throne and, when suffering from diarrhoea, to ride the porcelain bus or ride the porcelain Honda. The 'bus' in

question is of course the lavatory pan. To suffer from diarrhoea is to be caught or taken short, or to be loose-legged.

#### **URINE**

While the major terms for excreta concern themselves with the function of actually voiding waste matter from the body, that for urine, for all it that has equally venerable roots, is simply onomatopoeic. Piss, with its origins in Old French and Middle English, entered the modern language around 1290 and remained, as is typical of such latterday vulgarisms, in perfectly open use for the next seven hundred years and then, as the shadows of Victorian reticence gathered, vanished into the world of the taboo. In the last twenty or thirty years it seems to have made a comeback, though strictly on colloquial, not SE terms.

The 18C brings tea, long tea, and cold tea (thus tea voider: one who is urinating), and tail-water (tail\*: the genitals), and the 19C little jobs and number ones, but virtually every other term refers back to piss, or its modified euphemism piddle (18C). Thus pee and wee-wee reflect piss, while widdle echoes piddle. Like wee-wee, a nursery term, is tinkle, another one. The remaining terms are all rhyming slang: rattle and hiss (US), cousin sis, snake's hiss (Aus, 20C), Johnny Bliss and Micky Bliss; dicky diddle (piddle, plus dicky\*: penis); you and me and Robert E (Robert E. Lee: pee). The noun-form, urinating, adds the onomatopoeic slash and wazz, plus leak (all 20C) and more rhy. sl.: gypsy's (20C, gypsy's kiss) and Jimmy or Jerry Riddle (19C). The 19C also provides sweetpea, usually with reference to a woman urinating in the open air; the term is similar to other euphemisms with which decorous picknickers would excuse themselves: water the flowers, pluck the roses and others.

## TO URINATE

Inevitably the most widely used terms meaning to urinate simply take the basic words for urine or urination and add have, take or go for a. Alternatively the nouns simply become verbs, as in piss itself, wee, pee, piddle, widdle and so on. There are, however, a

number of words, and more particularly phrases, that add a colourful extra, if sometimes strainingly euphemistic vocabulary.

The oldest of these is probably lag (fr. the 16C term for water or wine and one that survived among the market traders of the 20C). The connection of urine to alcohol is maintained in rack off(19C, from the wine trade jargon meaning the drawing off liquor from the lees), drain off (19C), run off (19C) and tap a keg (19C, from the beer trade). The 18C also had pump and pump ship, only the latter has survived; similarly nautical is scatter (19C, the plural scatters means diarrhoea). Preeze, a Northern dialect term linked to the SE pressure, refers to ineffectual, if straining efforts to urinate, or indeed to defecate. Give the chinaman a music lesson reflects the 'China' toilet bowl, and the 'music' that is the 'tinkle' of the urine hitting it; point percy\* at the porcelain has a similar reference to the receptacle itself, while splash the boots implies standing at a urinal, and spend a penny refers to the traditional cost of Britain's public lavatories (although the urinals, unlike the stalls, were always free). Visit the sand box (an item usually reserved for one's pet cat) and visit Miss Murphy also refer to making a trip to the lavatory.

Phrases for the discharge of urine include squeeze the lemon (although this usually implies sexual rather than urinary images), bleed the liver, bleed one's turkey (punning on turkey-cock), water or drain the dragon (19C), strain the potatoes or taters, drain or strain the spuds, syphon the python, drain one's radiator, drain one's crankcase, drain one's lizard, take one's snake for a gallop, wring the rattlesnake and wring the dew off the branch. Equally popular are shake hands with an old friend, shake hands with the wife's best friend, shake the dew off the lily and shake a sock.

Two especially popular euphemisms are to see a man about a dog and its joking reverse to see a dog about a man, although neither excuse is exclusively for urination, merely leaving the room. Further euphemisms, mainly linked with taking an al fresco pee, include pick the daisies, pluck a rose, do a rural, burn the grass, go catch a horse, go look at the crops, shoot a lion,

water the horses, water one's pony or one's nag, kill a snake and kill a tree.

## THE LAVATORY

The earliest term for privy, and as such more a euphemism than pure slang is gong or gong house (11C), which comes from the Old English gang, meaning the act of walking or going and is, however remotely, an ancestor of the child's plaint, 'I've got to go'. Siege (1400, from the Latin sedem: a seat) originally means a privy, although by 1515 it is simply excrement. More recognisable is the 16C boggard, also meaning privy, which comes from the verb form of **bog** (16C), but is itself the origin of the nouns **bog** (18C), boghouse (17C) and bog shop (19C). Compost hole is a 19C synonym. Other 16C terms include jakes, Jacque's or jakehouse, all of which probably come from jack's or jack's place, and which must lead on to the 18C john (US, 1735). Ajax, punning on 'a jakes', appears in both Shakespeare and in The Metamorphosis of Ajax (1596) by Sir John Harington (c.1561-1612), a plea for the introduction of the water-closet which so displeased Queen Elizabeth I that its author was banned from Court.

The role of the lavatory as a separate place or 'house' informs many 17C terms, notably the chapel, the chapel of ease, the place or house of ease or easement, the house of office, the place of convenience or of resort, the closet of ease and the stool of ease. Similarly one 'sat' in the House of Commons or the Parliament, although the House of Lords (a 20C descendent) was merely a urinal. Other terms include the draught (1602), the scotch ordinary (1670) and the cod-Latin necessarium or necessary-house (in a shift of priorities to the 20C necessaries mean the genitals) and cacatorium, a pun on caca, from the Latin cacare to evacuate the bowels. Australia's 20C dunnee has its roots in the 17C dunnakin (fr. danna: human ordure, plus ken: a place

or house). Its variations donagher, donigan, dunnyken and dunny all emerge over the subsequent 200 years.

Two of the most enduring terms for lavatory appear during the 18C: john, still an essential term in America, and crapper, with its variations craphouse, crapping castle, crapping-ken, crapping-casa and crapping house, crappus and crappery (all 18C) and the 20C market traders' coinage crapereena. While popular etymology links all such combinations to the 19C sanitary engineer Thomas Crapper, who did indeed pioneer the flush lavatory, the root of crap lies in the 15C Dutch krappen meaning to cut off or separate. For further details see under DEFECATION.

Other 18C terms include the coy little house (and its 19C descendents little office and petty house), coffee-shop or coffee-house and spice island (also meaning the anus and defined by the early 19C Lexicon Balatronicum as a 'stinkhole bay or dilberry creek'), minor (possibly a misreading of the 18C euphemism my uncle's) and Jericho, which in more general use meant a place of banishment. A link with jerry, a chamber pot, would be more satisfactory, but the place appears c.1750 while the receptacle is a coinage of 1825.

Jericho was coincidentally known as the rough quarter of Oxford, and the universities are responsible for a number of 19C terms. The fake Latin colfabias was popular at Trinity College, Dublin, while in Oxford Worcester College opted for forakers, from the Latin forica, a privy; fourth was used at Trinity, Cambridge: at that time the college privies were sited in the fourth court and thus an undergraduate who had temporarily gone there would write upon his door 'Gone<sup>4</sup>'.

The 19C saw the coinage of another basic term: loo is possibly a punning abbreviation of Waterloo, or of the French warning 'gardez l'eau' ('mind the water', the 'water' in question being hurled into the street from a full chamber-pot) or from the 18C ladies' portable 'bordalou'—carried in a muff, it looked like sauceboat, but was actually travelling pissoir. The lavatory might also been called a dike (fr. SE meaning pit; a predecessor of the 20C Aus. use: vandyke), the quaker's burying ground (fr. quaker\* meaning turd), the rear or rears (punning on 'behind'), the back, back-

house or backy (all from the backyard privies, the sole plumbing available for many houses; such outside lavatories were and are one-, two- or three-holers) and the head or heads (a naval usage, taken from the position of the privy at the 'head' of a ship, near the bowsprit). Altar, throne and temple are a trio of euphemisms, as are visit Sir Harry or visit Mrs Jones, while where the Queen goes on foot or sends nobody maintain the elevated tone. West Central puns on the London postal district, WC. A karsy is based on the Italian assa, a house, while the thunder-box is an Indian army term; finally dilberry creek comes from dingleberry\*, thus dilberry-bush: the pubic hair.

Apart from the abbreviations lav and lavvy the 20C is a mix of euphemisms and bluntness. The former gives the quintessential little boy's or little girl's room, and my aunt's, with its rhyming variation Mrs Chant's (Mrs Ormiston Chant: a well-known moralist), both adopted by 'society' women of the 1920s. The latter is best seen in shitter and shithole (both also used for the anus), shouse and shithouse (although Partridge claims that this use is incorrect and the term should only apply to a commode [19C], a reviled person, or anywhere dirty [both 20C]). This theory is surely undermined by a pair of popular phrases: to bang like a shithouse door in a gale (of an sexually enthusiastic woman) and to be built like a brick shithouse (of a notably large or tough man). Pisshole and pisshouse are parallel terms, while snakes' house (Aus.) emphasises urination, with its abbreviation of the one-eyed trouser snake\*: the penis. Leakhouse comes from leak, to urinate, kybo either from khyber pass\* (arse) or, possibly, from an acronym: 'keep your bowels open'. Like the earlier john can, for the receptacle, is primarily American, while honey house refers to the colour of ordure and gives the combinations honey bucket (for night-soil) and honey-wagon for taking it away. Finally cottage, which emerged at the turn of the century meaning urinal, predates its modern, gay use by twenty years.

The latrine man, whose task it was to empty the privies in a world before automated water closets was variously the **gold finder** (cf. honey cart), the haut-boy, Tom Turdman (17C, thus Tom Turdman's fields or hole: the place where nightmen deposit the

soil) the gong man and gong farmer and the night man. To upset Mrs Jones (19C) was to empty the privy tub. Such emptying was always done at night, which earned it the heavily humorous description, a wedding.

#### THE CHAMBER POT

Early terms for chamber pot include the jockum gage (17C) from jockum\*: penis and gage (originally a mug holding a quart of beer) meaning a pot; member mug (17C) means exactly the same while a jordan, jordain or jurden (17C) all referred to the Biblical River of Jordan. Oliver's skull (c.1690) was an unashamed attack on the memory of the late Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658); similarly the later twiss (18C), an Irish coinage targeted the English writer Richard Twiss (1747-1821) who had published the highly critical Tour in Ireland. To take their revenge the Irish then produced a chamberpot with picture of Richard Twiss inside it, beneath which was inscribed the rhyme 'Let everyone piss/On lying Dick Twiss.'

The 18C also produced the thunder mug (a variation on thunder box and like it based on the noise of urination), the mingo (possibly from ming, meaning a stink, and thus a 'stinker'), the pisspot (which since its coinage in 15C had been SE, but was now exiled to the lexical margins) and the tea voider (fr. tea: urine). The lagging gage was based on lag: water and gage: mug or pot. The term survives as the market traders' 20C lag, urination. Looking glass is based on one's reflection in the urine, as well, possibly, as the attention paid by contemporary physicians to the urine itself.

The 19C saw the last real flourishing of terms for chamber-pot — other than earlier survivors and the nursery-based **pottie** the ubiquitious WC gradually rendered it redundant in a 20C house-hold. Among the 19C terms are the Scots dialect **chantie** and **mastercan**, it, jerker and jerry (fr. SE jereboam: an outsize bottle containing the equivalent of ten or even twelve normal measures). Po comes from the French pot de chambre, a chamber pot) and smoker or smokeshell from the steam that rises from hot urine

in cold weather; thus smokehouse meant privy. Remedy-critch comes from the SE remedy meaning ease and critch, an earthenware vessel; this in turn comes from cratch, a stable hayrack and thus a crèche; the term is used as such in early descriptions of Christ's birth. Finally, a chamber pot could also be a bishop, yet another assault on the episcopacy, whose character was regularly assassinated by the coiners of slang. Aside from bang the bishop\* (to masturbate) a bishop could be an outsize condom or a broken signpost which 'neither points the way nor travels it', as opposed to a parson: a whole signpost which 'sets people on the right way'.

Lavatory paper, a modern invention, is wipe or asswipe, bumf and bum-fodder, bogroll, tail timber (19C) and torch-cul (loaned from the French equivalent of bum-fodder).

# **EXCELLENCE**

## **EXCELLENCE**

It is perhaps because of slang's origins in cant, where the single adjective rum\* or rome (16C) served muster as an all-embracing term for good or excellent, that few particularly early terms of approbation have been recorded. The earliest appears to be topper, first recorded and still, if less commonly, to be found. It comes, naturally, from the SE top. The following century proves far more fruitful, offering a number of terms that have survived in more or less regular use down to the present day, as well as a number that have vanished.

Of the former group pippin and the abbreviation pip refer to the generic name for a number of species of apple, the first recorded in 1432, and more directly from the phrase 'sound as pippin' a synonym for 'sound as a bell'. Pippin has the added implication of physical attractiveness; such usage originates in the US around the turn of the 19C. Daisy, a slightly earlier US term that also looks to nature, has similar overtones of beauty. Less measured are the boldly declaratory snorter (mid-19C), scorcher (cf. hot stuff)

and scorch (20C, Afro-American), belter (Yorks. dial: whopper) and cracker, which originally referred to a fast horse, a large sum and similar adjuncts of the sporting life. Bobby dazzler (orig. a Midlands term) has lasted the course, as has the goods (US 19C, UK 20C) which is usually found in the phrase to 'deliver the goods'. Knockout and kayo (KO) appear to have links to the boxing ring, but may actually stem from the 17C knocker, which meant a notably attractive person and is found as such in Middleton and Rowley's play A Chaste Maid (1628). Out and outer began life meaning an unscrupulous person, a meaning it still carries, but the parallel image of excellent followed soon after. Duck soup is really obsolete, but survives in its locus classicus, the title of the Marx Brothers movie of 1933. A secondary meaning is of easiness, synonymous with the equally gustatory piece of cake. Its etymology remains obscure: the relation of easiness can be extended to people, making it synonymous with pushover\*. To link the soup, undoubtedly a Chinese dish, to the Chinese immigrants, generally regarded as inoffensive, is alas most likely one connection too far. Jim-dandy offers no such problems; coined in the US c.1887 its links to fashion make it a peer of the adjectival swell (19C).

Perhaps the most enduring 19C term is the phrase the real McKay or real McCoy. The origins of this venerable term of praise remain debatable. One party opts for Scotland, where it emerged in the 1880s to mean both men and whiskey of the highest quality. It has also been suggested that the clan McKay had at one period two rival chieftains, each heading their own branch. The arguments over which sub-clan, and which leader was the real McKay gives the phrase. The alternative version, and the alternative spelling, McCoy, as found in the US, refers to the boxer Norman Selby (1873-1940), whose ring name was Kid McCoy. Apocryphal tales had a drunk approaching the champion and demanding a fight. McCoy attempted to sidestep this foolish challenge but finally, his temper overcoming him, succumbed and floored his assailant. When the drunk recovered he supposedly announced, 'You're right, that was the real McCoy.'

Of the second category clipper, from the type of ship, referred first to horseflesh and then to people; pea had vanished in the UK

by 1900, although it has had some popularity in 20C Australia; Australia also hosted scrouger (originally US, and similar to the SE scrunch), which came from scrouge, meaning to shove out of the way and thus, as a noun something large or forceful; lummy came from Yorkshire dialect, especially as in a lummy lick: a delicious mouthful. Stem-winder still survives in US politics, where it refers to a rousing speech, but has vanished as a term for excellence. Both meanings came from the then (1890s) newly invented stem-winding watch, which with its rejection of any need for the usual key, was seen as the finest example of state of the art technology.

The 20C has added a number of terms. Bee's knees, cat's pyjamas and cat's whiskers are dated - they are all 1930s' coinages - but refuse to disappear; the teenagers' fave rave (fave: favourite, rave: something one raves over) tends only to ironic appearances today while Shovel City (something one 'digs') is positively embarrassing. More popular are lulu, a dilly, peach (often used of a pretty girl, although equally of an idea), hot stuff and the coarser hot shit, ace or aces (fr. the card), something to shout about, something to write home about and the jazzorientated something else. Australia ofers a variety, notably the stereotypical beaut, (c.1900, abbr. of beautiful), rip-snorter (long since exported to the UK), the lesser-known trimmer (fr. SE trim: neat) and humdinger which began life in the USAF meaning a fast airplane (fr. hum: speed, and dinger: something forceful) and thence moved via Australia to the UK. Other terms include the Afro-American bells (possibly from the approving phrase 'you ring my bell'), the berries (US, from berries: dollars, and thus something worthwhile), big time, but good, gravy (with its implication of a bonus) and corker (which has changed its meaning from the mid-19C when it meant the last word in argument and was an alternative spelling of caulker: a settler).

## **EXCELLENT AND FIRST-RATE**

Sixteenth century villains, the first recorded consistent users of slang, or more properly cant, had two all-purpose words for goodness: rum and the slightly less common bene. Rum could

mean good, fine, excellent or great and was the antonym of the equally widely used queer, meaning bad. According to Partridge, who deals with it at length, rum comes most probably from Rome (and indeed could be spelled rome until the 18C), which as a city meant glory and grandeur. Other origins include the Romany rom, a male gypsy, or the Turkish Rûm, which also meant gypsy, many of whom passed through the Ottoman Empire. Reversing the process, the Latin Roma (Rome) is cognate with the Teutonic root hruod (fame) (as found in the names Roger and Roderick) which appears in the German Ruhm (fame). Today rum has taken on something of an opposite meaning, being used to mean odd, eccentric or suspect. In that context, which appeared c.1725 (when it was noted in the New Canting Dictionary) it can be seen as the ancestor of all those bad = good constructions, typically wicked, nasty and bad itself, so common among modern youth. As good rum appears in many combinations, starting with Harman's 1567 listing of rome vyle (London), rome mort (Queen Elizabeth) and rome bouse (wine, literally 'good drink'). Other uses of rum (Partridge cites nearly one hundred), include rum bubber (17C, a fellow dextrous at stealing silver tankards), rum blowen (18C, 'a handsome wench'), rum joseph (17C, a very good cloak) and rum prancer (17C, a very fine horse); there are many more.

Bene, also spelt ben or even bien could be conjugated: benar: better and benat: best, and came from the French bon, meaning good. Harman offers bene bouse (good liquor), bene lightmans (good-day, good morrow) and bene pecke (good meat or food). Other combinations include bene mort (16C, a good, or pretty girl), bene darkmans (16C, good night) and bene feaker (17C, a counterfeiter, in which bene is synonymous with skilful).

The 17C provides a few new terms, notably bully, which in the 17-18C was used only of persons but which was extended to things as well in the 19C; used mainly in the US, perhaps its best-known appearance was in US President Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt's (1858-1919) oft-repeated dictum: 'The White House is a bully pulpit'. **Splendacious**, which would otherwise bear all the hall-marks of a more recent coinage, in fact appeared in the 17C, while its descendent **splendiferous** is 19C. **Cheery** is more of an

understatement, its basic meaning remains lively or cheerful; crack referred to things from 1630 and to people from 1700. Neat as ninepence is 17C, but its derivatives grand, nice or right as ninepence are all 19C. The 18C brings bang up (fr. bang up to the mark?), rich (with an added connotation of spicy or saucy), bobbish (fr. the image of one who bobs up and down with barely suppressed enthusiasms), tip-top (cf. topper) and up to the nines, especially as in 'dressed up to the nines'. The etymology remains obscure, but may come from the role of nine (three times three) as a mystical and thus laudable number. Finally dandy or d, like the later US swell, reflect the relations between high fashion and supposed excellence. Dandy first emerged from the Scottish borders c.1800 and by 1815 was a smart London word, describing the 'exquisites' of the era. It may in turn derive from Jack-a-dandy, coined c.1632, which, although it began life describing 'a little pert or conceited fellow' (OED) and was at best a contemptuous name for a fop, the contempt passed away and the modern meaning (itself not wholly devoid of suspicion) took over. Pink, especially as in 'in the pink', while usually found referring to health, also began life as a description of fashionable elegance, as did slick, meaning especially smooth. Dossy, primarily meaning elegant, comes either from a dosser, an ornamental cloth used that covers the back of an imposing seat, or from the Comte D'Orsay: whose character and thus name epitomised the perfect gentleman. However the 20C dossy (and its noun-form doss, both of which originate in the 18C doss: to sleep) refers to something easy - you could 'do it with your eyes closed', i.e. asleep.

Among the many words supplied by the 19C, one of the most enduring is the term A1, a category applied by Lloyd's Register to ships in first-class condition, as to hull and stores alike. As laid down in the Key to the Register. 'The character A denotes New ships, or Ships Renewed or Restored. The Stores of Vessels are designated by the figures 1 and 2; 1 signifying that the Vessel is well and sufficiently found.' The category was then added to the names of ships, e.g. 'the fast-sailing ship Sea-breeze, A 1 at Lloyd's'. The term gradually moved, as does so much jargon, into colloquial speech to

mean first-rate or prime; its first recorded citation appears in Charles Dickens' Pickwick Papers (1837).

Food and drink provide a number of 19C superlatives. The latter gives all brandy, the Aus. double-distilled and creamy; the former has clean wheat (presumably from commercial jargon, cf. A1), good as wheat, bread or cheese, and the cheese. This term, however, is edible only by pronunciation: its origin is most likely in the Persian and Urdu chiz, meaning thing. As Yule and Burnell put it in Hobson-Jobson (1886) 'The expression used to be common among Anglo-Indians, e.g. "My new Arab is the real chiz", i.e. "the real thing".' Hindi also offers the non-edible first chop, from chhaap meaning a print, and thus a seal, notably that which is placed on first-rate merchandise. Another Hindu term, brahma, was anglicized to mean both very good and, specifically, a pretty girl: like the statues of the god in question, she might well be covered in jewels. Jammy comes from jam, meaning luck, and gives real jam and its synonym true marmalade, while plummy derives from plum meaning very good, especially as in a plum job; scrumptious (and the much rarer scrumdolious) refer not so much to a specific foodstuff, but to general pleasurability. The 20C scrummy and yummy are both obvious developments. The pick of the basket assumes the context of food, while the pure quill, while non-edible, falls within this group.

As in nouns such as scrouge and humdinger, the concept of force may underline that of excellence. Hence slapping, slashing, smashing, slap up (fr. Northern dial.), crushing, ripping (redolent of the 'jolly good chaps' rhetoric of the Boys Own Paper), snappy, screaming and another schoolboy term, tons (among its earliest uses is that found in J M Barrie's Peter Pan [1904]). The world of commerce is similarly productive, giving all wool and a yard wide (fr. drapers' shops), that's the ticket (with its cousin that's Bible), at par and above par (both from the Stock Exchange), and the hammer (possibly referring to an auction house), with its variations just the hammer and up to the hammer. Knocker has overtones of physical beauty, and up the knocker means in the peak of condition. Bod and bodacious come from body and mean bodily or totally. Boiler-plated implies

absolute dependability and consistency, and is the root of the jargon boilerplate: meaning those clauses that appear regularly in a set of given documents, be they legal contracts or political speeches.

Simple supremacy comes in boss, number one and numero uno (with the 20C antonym number 10, as used in the pidgins of the Far East), prime and primo (the latter currently jargon for high-quality drugs, especially marijuana), first rate and rooter (used of anything first class). An air of cunning and foresightedness lies behind fly, up to Dick and downy (fr. the noun down: alarm or suspicion); a certain understatement informs all the go, about east, about right, all there, and proper, which had been SE between the 15-19C. Other, unclassifiable terms include classic. death (an early example of the bad = good syndrome, with the combination death on: very good at or keen on), doog (backsl. for good), fizzing (seen today as a euphemism for fucking, but possibly an innocent reference to the effervescence of champagne; cf. bobbish), great shakes (usually as 'no great shakes', and taken from the shaking of dice in gambling) hunky-dory and hunky (predating its current use as the description of the kind of muscular young boys who appeal to teenage girls), righteous (now mainly Afro-American use), rorty (possibly from the Yiddish: rorität: anything choice or from rhy. sl.: naughty), severely, spiffy and spiffing, sweet, tall (US, from the boastful exaggeration of tall stories) and tzing-tzing (possibly from chin chin). Nap is another gambling term, taken from the eponymous game: each player receives five cards, and calls the number of tricks he or she expects to win; one who calls five is said to go nap, and a nap hand, which will probably take all five tricks, is the strongest.

A final selection gives bona (fr. Parlyaree and commonly found as the intensifying very), splash up, down to the ground (often as 'that suits me...', although the 17C go down to the ground meant to defecate), clipping (fr. clipper\*), out-and-out (fr. out-and-outer\*), jonnick (meaning brave, tough, loyal and honest) and to rights (fr. the legalese 'to be to rights': to have a legal case against someone; it is the basis of the police or criminal jargon bang to rights: legally watertight or caught without any excuse). All Sir Garnet refers to the military successes of Sir Garnet (later

Lord) Wolseley (1833-1923), whose reputation was further enhanced by his efforts to improve the lot of the private soldier. All Sir Garnet appeared c.1885; the versions all sirgarneo, all sigarno or all Sir Garny coming slightly later.

Given the prevalance of youth culture in the 20C it is hardly surprising that of the most recent slang superlatives a large proportion emerge from the succession of fads and fantasies that have sequentially overtaken teen life. In a very approximate chronological order these include the jazz-related crazy (although crazy for had meant very enthusiastic since the 18C) and cool, another jazz term (of the late 1940s) which replaced its predecessor hot when bebop or bop - loosely known as progressive or modern jazz took over as the predominant form, ousting 'hot' jazz from fashion. Cool, both as a superlative, and, as a noun, is the description of a poised, distanced way of dealing with life (often underpinned by an intake of narcotics), moved away from jazz into the mainstream of teenage life during the 1950s and maintained its popularity until the hippie Sixties. Other 1950s terms, culled from the less mannered world of rock'n'roll (a white world rather than jazz's essentially black or Bohemian one) include neat, keen (and keeno) and peachy-keen, killer and killer-diller and major.

The early Sixties, with their deification of the Beatles, offered fab and gear — both allegedly culled from the Beatles' wacky\* Liverpudlian vocabularies. Fab was simply an abbreviation of fabulous (and could be expanded by the teen magazines into fantabulous, while gear harks back to the goods\*, as in the phrase 'that's the gear': that's what's required, that's perfect. Gear also meant clothing, as in the fictional Sixties emporium 'Fab Gear of Tooting', created for the decidely unhip contemporary television sitcom Hugh and I. Drugs, especially of the hallucinatory sort, appeared in the later 1960s, and with them came a number of drug-related terms: trippy (fr. the LSD trip), mind-blowing, heavy, far-out, out of sight (often spelt outasite, or even out of state), too much and groovy. Groovy had in fact a much older pedigree. 19C users related it to the phrase 'in a groove', and thus made it synonymous with conventional; 1940s jazz redefined

it in its modern context, but the hippie era saw its most pervasive flowering, typically in **groovy chick**, an attractive girl.

What rock writers termed the English invasion may have taken a few terms West along with such bands as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who, but the US remained dominant in teen culture. So did its language. The surfers of California, and their cultural cousins the Valley Girls of the early 1980s drew on the same vocabulary, introducing awesome, totally, mondo (fr. the Latin mundus: the world, and thus, its its meaning of all-encompassing synonymous with bodacious\*), bitchen, bitchin and the extreme bitchin twitchin (although bitchin had been an earlier 20C Aus. euphemism for fucking), to die, massive, total blowchoice (very appealling but finally irrelevant) and tubular, a degree of excellence that surpassed all others and came from the surfing jargon the tube: the inside curve of a good wave. Teen slang also comes up with a number of abbreviations, typically brill (brilliant) and TB (très brill), cas (casual, a deliberate understatement), def (definitive), ex (excellent), triff (terrific), rad (radical) v. and vg. (respectively very and very good), marvy (marvellous) and the all-purpose prefix mega-.

Black culture, first US and then UK, remains one of the foremost influences on all teen slang, with the white boys and girls for once finding themselves firmly at the back of the queue. Jazz came from the US black culture and today's hip-hop and rap music have created a number of terms, perhaps the classic among which is bad (with its intensfier baddest), the epitome of that vocabulary in which, whether ironically or with the age-old intention of slang the confusion of the outsider - terms that conventionally signify bad, in fact mean good. Others include tough, nasty, vicious, wicked and mean (which has the overtone of being so good it's unfair). Dope comes from the generic term for drugs, and implies that the object in question has the same pleasurable effect, cold refers back to cool and has the same image of studied indifference, while foxy links to fox, a good-looking girl. The earlier superfly (1970s) referred to the name of high-quality cocaine, and served as the title of a hit film; pimp, at least within a certain subculture,

also means first class. Finally, in what may be the ultimate in good/bad reversals (at least in religious eyes) is sex with Jesus.

Another major source of contemporary terms is Australia, always a leading coiner of slang, sometimes modified from English origins, but equally often brand new. Such terms include apples (either from the 18C apple-pie order or the rhy. sl. apples and spice: nice), bonzer, bonza and the cognate boshta (the first coined in 1904, and according to the OED at least, an elision of bonanza), dead set, ducky, grouse (often intensified as extra-grouse; in Aus. prisons a grouse is a tailormade, rather than a prison-issue cigarette) and mad. Out of the box (which parallels the phrase happy as a box of birds in very good spirits), ripper (the contemporary successor to the once all-conquering beaut\*), spot on (20C superseding the earlier bang on), unreal (cf. the contemporaneous out of sight and far out), stone (cf. dope, but stone as in the SE stone blind or stone deaf dates to 19C) and the rhyming slang Wee Georgie Wood (good), often found in the interrogative: any Wee Georgie?: any good?

Adult as well as teenage America has contributed its share of words. Among them are socko and boffo, both from show business, and both featuring largely within the pages of that home of the superlative, Variety magazine. The former comes from sock, to hit, while boffo and its companion boffola both come from boff, meaning a belly-laugh; thus a performance that elicits such laughter from the audience may be considered a success. Bonaroo is a Cajun term, from Lousiana, while copacetic, sometimes assumed (with no apparent etymological reason) to be Yiddish, most probably comes from Chinook jargon and, as originally used on the waterways of Washington state is properly copasence, meaning, like copasetic, everything is satisfactory. Hellacious is reminiscent of the earlier bodacious\*, high-tone carries an air of classiness, while hotsy-totsy, so redolent of the roaring Twenties, is best known as the name of New York's Hotsy-Totsy Club, owned by the gangster Jack 'Legs' Diamond (1896-1931).

The grab-bag of 20C superlatives ranges far and wide. **Dynamite** came with World War I (the explosive had been patented by Nobel in 1867), **electric** followed soon afterwards; similarly forceful terms

include bang on (abbreviating the RAF's 'bang on the target'), blinding (fr. blind\*), hot-shit and shit-hot, knockout and solid. The veteran topper\* lay behind top drawer (originally used in a class context: 'out of the top drawer'), top hole, top notch and top shelf, while a sense of fitness and satisfaction underpins the phrases just like mother makes it, just the job, just what the doctor ordered and just the ticket as well as right up one's alley or right up one's street. Gaff (fr. gaffer\*) and king carry on the idea of leadership as already found in boss\*; wizard comes from the World War II RAF use, much satirised in such phrases as 'wizard prang', while magic was popularised c.1975 through a television sitcom. Television has also introduced handsome (originally 16C), sponditious (fr. the comedian Lenny Henry) and stonking (popularised by Jonathan Ross).

Other terms include bagged, from in the bag and thus easy, all fine and dandy (also rhy. sl. for brandy), good as all getout, irey (Jamaican), jolly d (d.: decent), live (with implications of a live performance), on the money (gambling), out of this world (cf. out of sight), serious (perhaps the adjective of the yuppie 1980s) and sexy (a media, term referring not to actual sex, unless coincidentally, but to any story guaranteed to excite the readers). Crackerjack is a descendant of crack\*, although its original nautical use was to describe a dish of pounded biscuit with minced salt meat.

#### OTHER TERMS

A few general terms round out this section of goodness and excellence. To be excellent is to beat all or beat the band (both 20C), to go over big (19C), to go over like a million bucks, to hit the spot and make it big (all 20C); to take the cake, to take the biscuit or, more elaborately, to take the Huntley and Palmer (a leading biscuit manufacturer) are all 19C. Partridge cites a correspondent who claims, somewhat ponderously, that the cake in question refers to the Greek *pramous*, literally a victory cake, and originally a cake of roasted wheat and honey.

Exclamations implying excellence include encore!, far out! (and far fucking out!), fucking A! and perfecto! (all 20C); to

be quite good is better than a thump on the back with a stone (18C), better than a poke in the eye with a blunt (or sharp or burnt) stick, a slap in the belly with a wet fish or wet lettuce (all 19C); close but no cigar (US, from the solace offered unsuccessful punters on the carnival midway) and not so dusty (19C). That which is correct or done properly is according to Cocker (1760): Edward Cocker (1631-76), an engraver and teacher, was the writer of Cocker's Arithmetic (published posthumously in 1678) which dealt specifically in commercial questions. Its pre-eminence in its field lasted for at least a century, thus engendering the phrase. Americans have the parallel according to Gunter, referring to a similarly influential treatise. The same meaning of comme il faut is found in the later according to Hoyle: Edmund Hoyle was editor in 1752 of The Polite Gamester, soon retitled Mr Hoyle's Games of Whist (1760), then Hoyle's Games Improved (1786); editions continue to appear. An enthusiast is a flamer (a term that still persists in computer hacker jargon, where a flamer is one who waxes garrulous on an electronic Bulletin Board) while the adjective flaming (c.1840) remains common, especially in the term a flaming row. Finally the phrase that's the man that married Hannah (meaning that's good, that's as it should be) originated in Shropshire, then moved up to London.

## ОК

OK (and its intensifier A-OK) may not, strictly, be invariably used as a superlative, but as slang terms go it may well stand as the most controversial, the most argued over and the most promising candidate for ranking as what Eric Partridge, writing in fact of the word slang itself, as a 'prize problem word'.

Surely the lexicographers' favourite, the American scholar Allen Walker Read has indeed made something of a secondary career out of expounding upon its origins and it is Read to whom the OED has turned when searching out the word's etymology. That etmology, remarked Eric Partridge in *Slang* (1933) is 'hotly disputed' but finally attributes it to 'all, pron. oll, korrect' and dates it

from 1840 in the US and 1880 in the UK. The OED fortified by Read's researches, takes it back to 1839, but otherwise concurs.

The term originated as 'orl korrect' in 1839 and was then co-incidentally used in the election campaign of US president Martin Van Buren in 1840, when it conveniently suited his nickname 'Old Kinderhook', which came from the town of his birth Kinderhook, New York. The term was further popularized by the OK Club, founded in 1840, whose members were Democrats who backed Van Buren. The first use of 'oll korrect' (still spelt in full and as yet to gain its abbreviation) came, according to one story, during another campaign - that of the Whig Presidential candidate William Henry Harrison, when a local handyman in Urbana, Ohio, was commissioned to paint a banner for Harrison's supporter John Rock, a farmer. Unfortunately the handyman, Thomas Daniels, was illiterate and his slogan read 'The People is Oll Korrect'. Unfortunately another researcher has squashed this otherwise appealing story. Such harsh demolitions mark the history of research into OK, but neither they nor the OED, whose word may be assumed to be final, have finally flattened those who love to probe the term. Alternative versions were and are legion. They are, alas for their proponents, universally wrong, but it would be churlish to ignore their optimistic inventiveness.

Among them are the railway freight agent who signed bills of lading 'OK', after his name Obadiah Kelley; an Indian chief known as Oled Keokuck whose friends abbreviated his name to OK and often said 'OK, he's all right'; Aux Kayes, a Haitian port from where the best rum came from the initials the multi-millionaire John Jacob Astor used to sign bills presented to him for credit; an invention by US telegraphers to accompany NM meaning 'no more', and GA meaning 'go ahead'; the British word 'hoackey' or 'horkey' meaning the last load brought from the fields which signified the end of the harvest and the beginning of rustic celebrations. Two particularly popular theories attributed the term to the Choctaw okeh meaning 'it is', or to the West African language Wolof, brought to the US by transported slaves.

More ideas included the French au quai (meaning 'on the quay' and thus either referring to goods ready for transportation, or from

the quays on which French soldiers met US girls in the War of Independence in 1776); the Finnish word oikea meaning correct; the Orrins-Kendall company which put its initials on its boxes of crackers: of high quality and eaten widely during the US Civil War they were known to soldiers as OKs; certain bills in House of Lords had at one time be signed and initialed by Lords Onslow and Kilbracken; from the initials 'H.G.', pronounced 'hah gay' which were used by Scandinavian sailors and came from Anglo-Saxon hofgor meaning seaworthy; from the Greek omega chai a magical incantation against fleas; from the signature of the Prussian General Schliesen who initalled all official documents Oberst Kommandant or OK; from the Scottish 'och aye' and from the 18C French form of oui (meaning yes) which was pronounced o qu oui.

# INTELLIGENCE

#### **INTELLIGENT PERSONS**

Slang being what it is, few of the terms that indicate an individual's intelligence are not tinged with a certain disdain. England's traditional fear of the overly bright (generally echoed across the Atlantic) guarantees few bouquets. The able person however, uncorrupted by suspicious intellect, receives a far more positive treatment. In either case, of course, there are but a fraction of the terms allotted to the foolish.

Earlier centuries appear virtually devoid of such terminology; fools abound but intellectuals keep their distance. The 19C sets the pattern with know-all and the later know-it-all, followed around the turn of the century by highbrow and its contemporary egghead—both terms acknowledging the belief that a large brain required a commensurately substantial forehead. Highbrow duly generated the gradations of middlebrow (1906) and lowbrow (1925), while egghead has remained popular, typically in the Variety magazine headline coined to celebrate the wedding of playwright Arthur Miller to superstar Marilyn Monroe: 'Egghead

Weds Hourglass'. Afro-Americans opt for gallon-head. The early 20C also has the unequivocal and relatively neutral brain (the children's brainbox is a development) and longhair, apostrophised in Sinclair Lewis' novel Main Street (1920): 'I'm surprised to find you talking like a New York Russian Jew, or one of these long-hairs!', a sentence that sums up the Anglo-Saxon opinion of the openly clever. Longhair as intellectual is somewhat dated, but the term was revived in the late 1960s to mean hippie, a member of a youth cult that exulted in its long (male) hair, and which was also tainted, in many eyes, by its apparently thinking too much. Pointyhead, another anatomical fantasy, was coined in 1972 by the right-wing governor of Alabama, George Wallace, who used it in his regular attacks on US liberals. England is particularly fertile in terms that basically mean too clever for your own good. They include clever-clogs (19C, from Northern dial.), clever-boots, smartypants, smart arse, clever Dick and smart Alec. The US equivalent is wisenheimer or wise guy (although the wise guys are one of many euphemisms for the US Mafia). Only the US smart cookie, razor (who is 'sharp') and maven (Yiddish, from the Hebrew mavin: understanding) allow the intellectual any credibility. A certain affection underlines old dog (AA: expert in a given field) but the usual contempt returns for culture-vulture, coined in the 1940s to replace the earlier culture-hound and pseud (1960s, abbrev. pseudo-intellectual); once public school slang for anyone raising their sights above the philistine, the word was adopted by the magazine Private Eye and enshrined in its regular column 'Pseud's Corner'

An out-and-out scholar is a **sponge** (i.e.one who learns easily) or, if feminine a **blue**, abbreviating blue stocking. This term originated c.1750 when a coterie of intellectual ladies – Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Vesey, and Mrs. Ord – set out to replace London society's traditional post-dinner pursuits – card-playing – with more cerebral amusements. As part of the new attitudes, formal dress was no longer required and among those who attended their soirées was Benjamin Stillingfleet, who habitually wore grey or blue worsted, instead of black silk stockings. Admiral Boscawen, a staunch traditionalist, thus derided such gatherings, labelling them

'the Blue Stocking Society' and the ladies were called Blue Stockingers, then Blue Stocking Ladies, and finally Blue Stockings.

The able person, as suggested, receives a much more positive treatment. He or she can be a sensation (19C), no slouch or nobody's fool (19C), a clever dog, hot stuff, a good head or a crack hand. Earlier terms include a long crown (as in the proverb: 'That caps long-crown, and he capp'd the devil'), a long ear or a whipster (although the implication here is of cunning as well as ability). A dab or dabster (17C, thus dab hand) was originally a topflight gamester. The natural began life as a harlot (16C), moved on to meaning bastard (18C, from SE natural child, whose parents are linked by nature, not by religion) before meaning one who is naturally (by dint of nature) talented. The ace is a coinage of World War I, when it was used by the RFC and RAF to characterize their best fliers. Superlatives include the tops and a whiz (fr. wizard); the cheese, meaning the real thing, comes from India (see GOOD for its etymology). A hopeful contestant is an up-and-comer. Experienced figures can be old hands (18C), old-timers (19C) or vets (20C, from veteran). Those who make predications are crystal-gazers, dopesters and dopers (who dope things out; from dope: information, thus get the dope on: to find out about), steerers and tipsters.

#### INTELLECT

The abstract idea of intelligence is most famously rendered concrete by Agatha Christie's coinage, the little grey cells, created for her Belgian detective Hercule Poirot in his first appearance, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Her phrase drew presumably on the earlier grey matter (19C) which referred to the colour of the human brain. Otherwise terms have tended to the abstract. Nous (loosly translated as common sense, and set in opposition to actual learning) is taken from the Greek word vovo meaning mind. Its first slang use is by Alexander Pope in *The Dunciad* (1729). Another foreign language, French, is responsible for savvy (18C, from savoir, to know or understand), and Yiddish, and before it Hebrew, give cocum: knowledge. Gaum or gawm come from a dialect term,

defined by Grose in his *Provincial Glossary* (1787) as meaning to understand. Thus the popular belief that the similar **gorm** is a back-formation from the popular **gormless** (foolish), is negated; it is simply a mis-spelling. **Gawm** also provides the root of **gumption**, which, if Grose is correct, is merely a version of **gawmtion**. Other terms are **horse sense** (US, horses were presumed to be supplied with some natural intelligence) and **smarts**. The **smart money**, from gambling, is the sensible viewpoint. As well as **dope\***, knowledge can be **know-how** and the **nitty-gritty** (originally Afro-American) with its implication of the essential.

#### TO BE CLEVER OR AWARE

Meliorists may choose to see the terms that follow as referring to intellect, but the qualities on offer are far more those of knowing 'what's what' than of those dependent on any academic skills. The great majority of such phrases are prefaced by 'know' (and there exists a parallel vocabulary, indicating ignorance, which simply adds 'not'). For the most part they are self-explanatory; those that are not have been amplified. In chronological order they are to know what is what (1400) to know what's what (1600), to know A from a battledore, to know A from a windmill and to know B from a bull's foot (15C) (all 15C), to know B from a battledore and to know which way the wind blows (both 16C). To know a hawk from a handsaw in which handsaw is generally recognised as a corruption of heronshaw or hernsew meaning a heron appears to be a phrase exclusive to Shakespeare. It is used only once, in Hamlet (1602): 'I am but mad North, North-West: when the Winde is Southerly, I know a Hawke from a Handsaw.' More terms include to know how many numbers make five, to know how many days go to the week, to know how the cards are dealt, to know a shilling from sixpence (all 17C); to know a thing or two, to know a trick or two to know which way is up, to know up from down, to know great A from a bull's foot (all 18C).

19C versions are to know A from the gable-end, to know B from a broomstick, to know how many beans make five, to

know one's way about, to know something, to know what o'clock it is, to know the time of day and to know how many go to a dozen and to know the ropes (fr. naval use). The 20C has to know enough to come in out of the rain, to know one's age, to know one's anus from one's ankle, to know one's arse from a hole in the ground, to know one's arse from one's elbow, (20C arse is often euphemised as 'ears'), to know one's boxes (fr. printers' jargon: the boxes are of metal type), to know one's eccer (Aus., eccer: exercise, or school homework), to know one's kit (originally military), to know one's onions, to know one's stuff, to know more than one's prayers, to know what's happening, to know what time it is (currently popular in the language of rap music: 'Tell them what time it is!'), to know where one's arse hangs (said of one who has come up in the world and is suspected of forgetting their origins), to know whether one is Arthur or Martha (20C Aus., the term can also be used to denote a degree of sexual ambiguity), to know it backwards, to know it down to the ground, to know one's stuff and to know whether it's pancake Tuesday or half-past breakfast time. To know where the bodies are buried is to have knowledge which gives one leverage over others, and is often used in a political context.

A number of similar phrases substitute 'have' for 'know'. Among them are to have the inside track (19C, the original meaning of inside track, as used by racing men, was the truth), to have the inside running is to have an advantage (both terms come from the race track where the inside track, nearest the rails, gives horses an advantage). To have the goods on, to have dead to rights, to have it pegged (fr. 19C peg: to work hard, to hammer it out; or from pegged down: steady) are all 19C. To have bang to rights means to catch in the act, especially as in (fictional) conversations between police and criminals. 20C versions are to have a line on (fr. marksmanship), to have the stuff on, to have down cold (cold has subsequently become popular as an adjective meaning extremely or very, used as such by the rap\* community), to have down pat, to have its number (fr. telephones) and to have it

straight, to have it sussed (fr. suss out: to puzzle out, in turn linked to sus: suspect or suspicious; thus sus or sussy: aware).

Other phrases that suggest shrewdness or native wisdom include see with half an eye (19C, although the phrase has origins in the 15C), see through a mill-stone and see through a brick wall (both 19C), to be on the ball, to have all one's marbles (cf. lose one's marbles) and to have what it takes (20C, orig. US, in Aus. what it takes: money), to be bright as a new pin or bright as a button (20C), to have a head on one's shoulders, to be nobody's fool, not be born yesterday, not be as daft as one looks or not be as stupid as one looks. A number of term are based on the head: use the old bean, use the chump, use the noggin, use the loaf and use the turnip. The Afro-American graduate means to gain knowledge, though not specifically of an academic sort. As well as such verb combinations as to be hep\*, to be on the inside track\*, other 20C terms include be posted, be wise to, be up on, get next to and make for.

#### USING ONE'S SENSE

Savvy\*, seen above as a noun, is equally valid as an adverb, as is sharp which the 18C referred solely to a cheating gambler, but in the 19C had broadened into meaning one who is well informed. Half-wide (19C) had an earlier, 16C incarnation as immoral, both terms are abbreviations of wide-awake; fly (19C) comes from the 18C Scots flee, both terms mean aware as does the 19C phrase no flies on... The latter definitely refers to the insects, and the need to keep alert if one wishes to avoid them settling; the former may do as well - the image is of the difficulty of catching flies - but there are equally valid claims for a root in fledged or even the cant term flash\*. Less problematic are all there (the root of all those phrases meaning not all there\* and denoting stupidity or even madness), not so dumb, not so dusty (fr. SE dusty: worthless) and down or down to (all of which are 19C). An addict of what the speaker considers to be difficult words must have swallowed the dictionary, (19C, often abbrev. as the dick). Tasty, especially popular in television's contemporary police series, originally (18C)

referred only to food, and meant simply appetising. The extension to its modern definition comes with the 19C, although the word still carries an image of being 'good enough to eat'.

Jerry (20C), an abbreviation of in full jerry: up to someone's tricks comes from the verb to jerry: to understand (19C), itself based on jerrycumumble, which in rhyming slang, gives both the modern tumble (to) or rumble. On the beam (20C) originated in the RAF, where the beam was that of the radar, and one could be on or off it. Other 20C terms include there with the goods, smart, first cab off the rank (Aus.), quick on the trigger, spunko (20C, from spunk: spirit) and swift, although the phrase a bit swift means unfair or taking unfair advantage. The swiftness, acceptable in oneself, becomes a negative quality in another.

Black America has down, necklaced, ready and ready-eyed and triple hip. Hardcore, popularised in America's black ghettoes has spread, like so much slang, to white teenagers on both sides of the Atlantic (its original meaning was extreme pornography); the same fate has been accorded street, with its variations streetified, street smart and street wise, all of which give primacy to the sort of wisdom gained surviving in the urban jungle. Earlier teen terms include cool\*, hep (first used among jazz fans of the 1940s, but rooted in the 19C hep: shrewd which comes in turn from 'Hep!', the exhortation of the ploughman or driver urging his horses to 'Get up!' and get lively), and its successor hip, the beatnik's term of choice and the root, in its turn, of the hippies of the late 1960s. The hippies themselves had their own coinages, notably together, turned on, and switched on (all of which had a certain drug-related aura); with it, an early 1960s term, was, like dolly bird\* and groovy\*, more celebrated in the media than amongst the slang speakers. Finally the phrase who slept in the knife box? (and is thus 'sharp') is a slightly mocking query of those considered to be showing off their brains.

To see one's own interest is variously to blow wise, get hep, get smart, get wise, get next to oneself, get one's head screwed on, get one's mind right (also as come to one's senses), get straight (to oneself), smarten up and wise up. Those terms, all 20C, plus to be jerry to, to be on one's wavelength, to have

down, to have one's number, to have one sussed, to know what makes one tick, know where one is at, to know where one is coming from and to know where one's head is at (the latter pair culled from New Age psychobabble), all give the meaning of knowing another person's motives, and by implication taking care of oneself.

# **FOOLS**

After parts of the body, or at least those that are involved in sex, states of the mind, specifically the state of foolishness, with its gradations from eccentricity to certifiable insanity generate a wide range of language. Slang, on the whole, does not immediately distinguish: the differences must be assumed from the context.

#### THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The first recorded term for a fool is looby (14C), a precursor of the 20C adjective loopy and an ancestor of the children's television character, the puppet Looby-Loo. More contemporary are lubber (14C, the basis of the 16C nautical land-lubber) and lob (16C), both of which, like looby, have the added dimension of physical slovenliness, of a hulking boor as well as a fool. Lob and the slightly earlier lobcock (of which it must thus be an abbreviation) have a further dimension, that of the relaxed or only half-erect penis (cf. lazy lob\*) - the image is thus one of laziness, of 'hanging around'. A final development of looby is the 19C lobby (which combined with the assonant lud made up the name Lobby Lud, an intinerant character whose task was to boost the circulation of one Fleet Street newspaper by appearing in holiday resorts and paying out small rewards to those who recognised him from his picture in that day's edition of the paper). A natural (1533) has two alternative, possibly parallel sources. A natural child is a bastard, otherwise known as a get, which gives the 20C get or git, synonyms for fool; at the same time the natural is 'one who is by nature deficient in intelligence;

a fool or simpleton by birth.' (OED). The ironic wise may well come from the contemporary phrase 'as wise as Waltham's calf' (cf. calf, below) or the three wise men of Gotham, among whose idiocies was the dragging of a pond to extricate the reflected moon. A ninny-hammer is based on the original meaning of ninny: a 'canting, whining beggar'.

Prat, still widely used, comes from the alternative meaning of the buttocks while hoddy peak can also mean a cuckold; hoddy comes from the hoddy-dod, a snail, and the inevitable horns\*, the mark of a cuckold, are in this case those of the snail. Nature is at the heart of the remaining 16C terms. Buffle, giving the 17C variation bufflehead (and the 20C boofhead) comes, from the French buffle meaning buffalo; thus the OED, although why a buffalo was de facto stupid must remain debatable. A tame goose, a widgeon (Freddie Widgeon is of course one of P. G. Wodehouse's foolish Drones) and a cuckoo (although the cuckoo's habits seem sly rather than foolish) present a trio a foolish 'birds' (leading presumably to the later birdbrain). Finally come lamb, calf and calf-lolly (fr. calf, plus the nautical loblolly: a cadger).

## THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The nature motif continues into the 17C with bullfinch and gawk (whether from the Scots dial. gowk: cuckoo and thus fool; or from gawk meaning to stare at) but such terms stand alone amongst the other new coinages. A singleton came either from single meaning simple or as an elision of a 'single ten': since the ten in cards ranks one below the knave, 'he' must therefore be a fool. Nizzie is rooted in one of two words meaning foolish: the French niais or the SE niæ. Sop abbreviates the derogatory SE milksop, while fopdoodle combines doodle, a fool, with the original, 15C meaning of fop: also a fool (fr. the French fat, and the Latin fatuus). The 16C SE zany, meaning clown (especially as one performing in the Italian Commedia dell' arte) and later fool, gives sawney (plus its verb-form, meaning to whine and wheedle, cf. ninny-hammer) and yawney (19C). A real-life clown, Jack Adams, gave his name to another 'foolish' synonym; Jack Adam's parish was Clerkenwell, where

he presumably lived, while similar terms are jack fool and jack pudding. Another proper name, tony, normally an abbreviation of Anthony, also meant fool, and is used as such in Middleton's play *The Changeling* (1623). Three near-nonsense words nimenog, nigmenog and nigit (an eejit or idiot) round out the century.

#### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

If nature characterised the 16C terminology, then foodstuffs have an influence of the 18th. Gooseberry may be a laboured reference to the sweet, gooseberry fool, while cake refers to the 'softness' of the unintelligent head. Noodle only sounds like a food, it is more likely to have some link to noddle, meaning head, which it can also mean, although the OED separates the two meanings. Further images of food can be found in macaroon or macaroni, but these two are red herrings: this use of macaroni comes from the Italian maccherone, meaning a blockhead, fool or mountebank and is referred to as such in Joseph Addison's Spectator (1711). This macaroni has no relationship to his dandified cousins, who won their nickname from their ostentatious consumption of what was then an exotic foodstuff: pasta. Gawney came from the Midlands dialect term meaning to stare vacantly; gabes and gaby, respectively from East Suffolk and Yorkshire, meant much the same. Sumph came from Scots dialect. A flat or flattie was a rustic or peasant, especially as seen as the target of a thief or con-man, while tom doodle simply extended the 17C doodle, tom being a general term meaning simply man. A griffin (in SE a mythical animal usually represented as having the head and wings of an eagle and the body and hind quarters of a lion) was defined by Jon Bee as 'a grinning booby who hath lost a tooth or two at top and the same at bottom' and might remind modern readers of Mad magazine's mascot, the irrepressibly doltish Alfred E. Neuman and his catchphrase 'What, me worry?'

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Many of the strains that emerged in earlier centuries reappeared in the 19th. Proper names offered Billy Barlow (a real-life street

clown of c.1840), and Jim Crow, which in this context is simply rhy. sl. for saltimbanco, meaning a street clown, although the original (and far more extensive) use of Jim Crow\* was based on the 'nigger minstrel' song with its refrain 'Wheel about and turn about and jump Jim Crow'. It was this version of Jim Crow that lay behind the 20C term that became generic for the whole apparatus of US racial discrimination. Its use as a racist epithet can be seen under RACE. Less controversial names included the dialect terms Ralph or Ralph Spooner, Johnny, Johnny-cake (cf. cake\*) or Johnny-raw (all meaning a rustic simpleton as do shaney or shany; cf. flatty), Toby Trot and Tom Tug (rhy. sl. for mug\*). Rube, from Reuben a 'typical' rural name, was especially popular among America's touring showmen, who used it as their warning cry: 'Hey, Rube!' Silly Billy, and the abbreviated silly, came from a generic term for a clown, as possibly is bozo (20C), which means man in Spanish, but may refer to the character Bozo the Clown.

Dundreary referred to the character Lord Dundreary, a foppish fool in Tom Taylor's play Our American Cousin, which piece President Lincoln was watching on the night of his assassination. Juggins is a general term, meaning specifically one who is so foolish that he can be prevailed upon to buy every round of drinks (the term is an extension of jug) but gained greater use through the notoriety of one Henry Ernest Schlesinger Benzon, better known to London's sporting fraternity as the 'Jubilee Juggins'. Benzon, the son of a Birmingham umbrella frame maker, went through an inheritance of £250,000 (a massive sum at the time) in less than two years. His last pennies went in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, thus earning him his nickname. Only the kindness of his fellow patrons of the raffish Romano's Restaurant in the Strand who established a fund that sustained him on £7.00 per week for life saved him from absolute penury. Other terms for juggins are jay and j, while muggins, an extension of mug, obviously parallels it semantically. Cousin Betty referred specifically to women, and could also mean a tart\*. Finally the phrase he is none of John Whoball's children means he's no fool; a convoluted confection playing on whoaball meaning

milkmaid which in turn combines whoa meaning stop and ball: a common name for a cow.

Further dialect term include buffer (Scots), doddy (Norfolk), gump (Yorkshire; the 'homely, parochial, awkward, well-meaning' gump was adopted as a trademark by the 20C comedian Norman Wisdom) and joskin or josser (both from the dialect joss, meaning bump, itself found in the SE bumpkin). Nature gives dodo, (either from the extinct bird or from doddy), cod or cod's head, lights (more usually an animal's innards, but possibly an early version of the 20C lights on but nobody home\*) and jacob (usually meaning the bird a jay, it puns on jay or j meaning juggins\*. As well as the rustics listed above, other dupes include the mug (into which one can 'pour' anything), the go-along and the pigeon. The muff, from the softness of a real muff, is soft in the head, as is a sammy-soft or softy; a jobbernowl mean's literally a fool's head, from jobbard meaning simpleton; the nod(ge)cock or noddy wags his head foolishly while the strut-noddy has no idea of his own stupidity. A stump is, like the SE term, short and thick, while the trunk is all body and no head.

More 19C terms include duffer (otherwise a seller or maker of a variety of counterfeit goods), gulpin (originally a Royal Marine), loon or loony (fr. lunar: moonstruck) and moony, tootledumpattick, crack (fr. crackbrain), eejit (phonetically mis-spelling idiot), gooby (possibly from goof), greener, greenhorn or greenlander (all dependent on green: naive). Physical inadequacies are underlined in crock (usually meaning injured) and dotty (with definite links to doddery, meaning weak or stumbling). Side sim is a simpleton, nias comes from the earlier nizzie\*, and slowcoach is the root of the 20C US slowpoke and before it meant vagina, dickey-dido meant simply fool. Finally mome, mo-mo or momo come either from the French mome: a little child or an innocent, or from the English mum meaning dumb. Lewis Carroll's mome as in the 'mome raths outgrabe', used in 'Jabberwocky' and found in Alice Through the Looking Glass (1871) has no bearing on stupidity; writing in 1855 Carroll himself defines it as 'solemome' or solemn and thus grave.

#### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Reflecting, no doubt, the world about it, 20C slang adopts a harder, more combative edge than does that of earlier centuries. Thus of the modern terms meaning fool a good number are synonymous with those usually found meaning the genitals, especially the penis. Thus one finds tool\*, wienie\*, pud\*, dildo\* and dork\*, as well as the Yiddish schmuck or (in its euphemised form) schmo (fr. the German/Yiddish term meaning jewellery or ornament and thus the penis, cf. family jewels\*), goober (US, usually a peanut). Numbnuts combines nuts, meaning testicles (and crazy), with numb, as in braindead, while poop began life in the 17C as the buttocks. Horse's arse and horse's hangdown are self-evident, while in Australia a flipwreck is one whose idiocy is atttributed to the supposed results of excessive masturbation (cf. flip oneself off). Perhaps the best-known of all such 'genital' terms is berk, the abbreviation of Berkeley hunt or Berkshire hunt, rhy. sl. terms for cunt, otherwise meaning vagina, but also used as an all-purpose pejorative. A second layer of rhy. sl. is found in Charlie Smirke. Whether poon (Aus.) is related to the US poontang\* (vagina) and is thus cognate with berk is debatable; the Australian National Dictionary (1988) gives no hint of such a relationship, although it does link poon and ponce\* (which exists as a term of abuse, although with no special emphasis on stupidity).

Yiddish and Australian both make a notable contribution. If the Eskimos have an infinity of terms for snow, so do Yiddish speakers have a number for fool. They include schlub (not just a fool, but a coarse bumpkin too), klutz (fr. the German klutz meaning block of wood, a heavy person or a giant) and shlemiel, a word that comes from the proper name Shlumiel, son of the leader of the tribe of Simon (see Numbers, ii) and notable for his inability to win any of the battles in which he fought. Leo Rosten, writing in The Joys of Yiddish (1968), sets out the precise hierarchy of idiocy: 'The schlemiel trips and knocks down the shlimazel, and the nebech repairs the shlimazl's glasses'. Schmeggege and schnook sound Yiddish, but in fact, if one takes 'real' Yiddish to be that spoken in eastern Europe, they are both inventions, coined by the immigrants who

flooded into the US c. 1900. Australia's contributions include clunk, dill or dilly (cf. dildo), gig and tonk. For all that popular etymology links it to Australia's Aborigines, nong or ning-nong are strictly European: the origins are either nimenog\* or even the Latin non compos (mentis). Galah comes from the name of the rose-breasted grey backed cockatoo 'much given to chatter', while drongo was originally the name of a 1920s racehorse that consistently finished last or thereabouts in all of its thirty-seven races; Drongo was thereupon taken up as the name for a slow-witted figure in the political cartoons appearing in The Melbourne Herald.

Nature has its usual say with coot (an allegedly stupid bird), kook (US, an abbreviation of cuckoo\*), cluck (as in a chicken) and dingbat (cognate with the phrase bats in the belfry); boob is an abbreviation of the 17C booby, a term that meant both a fool and the Sula fusca, a species of gannet that was so nicknamed from its apparent willingness to let itself be caught; noddy, another 17C term for fool, is also a seabird, this time the tern-like Anous stolidus. Food gives veg (fr. vegetable), fruitcake (which is full of 'nuts'), mutt (either from muttonhead\* or from the popular nickname for a dog), lunchbox (as in the phrase out to lunch) and nana (fr. the banana which is soft [in the head]). Goof and goop share a similar reference to softness. Simple stupidity underlines such terms as dope (possibly from Cumberland dialect), ig man and ignant (both Afro-American, both abbreviations of SE ignorant), lame (fr. lamebrain), loogan (US), lunk (fr. lunkhead), simp, stupe, thickie, thicko and gink. Dingaling and ring-ding both have the implication of the rattling within an empty head, screwballs have a 'screw loose', bugs, a term whose most celebrated exemplars are the US gangster Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel and the cartoon rabbit Bugs Bunny, are 'bugs in the head'. The US Army gives a section eight (that section of the US Military Code under which a man is discharged on the grounds of mental instability) and, from the Vietnam era, FNG or effengee (a 'fucking new guy', whose inexperience is bound to render him inadequate); sickie abbreviates sick in the head, while the children's term spaz comes from spastic and often denotes physical as well as mental problems. Twit and nit are also mainly playground terms (the former cognate

with various terms based on birds, the latter coming from louse, thus nitwit means literally louse brained).

A wet goose or wet foot (fr. wet: naive plus goose\* and SE tenderfoot) is naive; whacko comes from the Yorkshire dial. whacky, meaning a dolt. Clod (fr. clodhopper) and shitkicker (US) both carry on the tradition of identifying the peasant with stupidity. Dipshit, with its euphemised form dipstick (as heard in television's Only Fools And Horses) is simply derogatory, while Dublin University graduate plays on the stereotype of the stupid Irishman; Herbert, often pronounced as 'Erbert, is presumably a 'silly' name, while the West Indian quashie comes from Kwesi, a child born on a Sunday. The Afro-American semolia probably refers to a once-celebrated mental hospital. A stumer comes from stumer meaning a dud cheque, hence a dud anything including a person, like the nine-bob note, a three-dollar bill is abnormal while a two-foot rule rhymes with fool. Specific terms include schoolbook chump (AA: one who is intellectual but not intelligent) and square-eyes (one who watches too much TV, and is therefore considered stupid). A foolish person can look like he wouldn't piss if his pants were on fire; one might tell a dullard one of these days you'll wake up dead.

#### **HEAD**

Many terms for fool refer, quite logically, to the head. They are arranged here in approximate chronological order.

The 16C gives block (also meaning hard-hearted) and block-head, goosecap (fr. the 'silly' goose and the use of cap to mean head) and calf's head (fr. calf\*); beef-witted is an adverbial form. The 17C has clodpoll and clodpate (poll and pate both meaning head; thus the epithet: clod-skulled), souse-crown (fr. souse: thump) cabbage-head, beef-brain and hulverhead, (fr. hulver: holly), while the 18C includes addlepate, addle cove and addle head (fr. SE addle: to confuse) noddy pate, noddy-head and noddipol (fr. poll: head) numbskull, sheep's head (also meaning garrulous) and beefhead. The 19C has mutton-head, crackpot (also a crank) muddle head, muffin head, sate-poll, plump-

pate (i.e. fathead), and pestlehead (fr. pestle: penis, thus pestlehead is a prototype of dickhead).

Most of these terms are 20C coinages, the majority of which are still in use: airhead, boofhead, bubblehead; birdbrain; bonehead, cement-head, lamebrain, lunkhead, meathead, musclehead, thickhead, stupe-head; dickhead, diphead, dorkbrain, fuckhead, fuckwit, poophead, toolhead; chowderhead, chucklehead (US 20C, fr. chuckle: clumsy or stupid), crapbrain, deadhead (20C), fathead; hammerhead (possibly fr. hammer: penis, thus another dickhead clone), squarebrain and wethead (all Afro-American); head-banger (also used to describe fans of heavy metal rock music), mental job, nutter, nutcake, puddinghead, pinhead, prawnhead (Aus.), zipalid (a lid or head with a zip, from which the brains have been removed); jolt(er)-head, shatterbrain, shatterpate, weather-head (which nods from side to side like a weatherock) and loggerhead.

#### **ASS**

Donkeys may well be stubborn rather than stupid, but this has not spared them centuries of identification with stupidity. All that remains today is ass, which dates to the 18C, but earlier eras have baldwin, cuddy, Dick, Edward, Issachar, Jack, Jenny, Neddy (all 18C) and moke, donkey, Jerusalem pony, longears, myla and softhorn (all 19C). Perhaps the most intriguing, and a proof that in the coining of slang little really changes, is the King of Spain's trumpeter, a ponderous pun on the fictional aristocrat 'Don Key' and a term that, while different in meaning, in style predates by two centuries today's Spanish archer, the equally punning 'El Bow'.

## DUMB AND TOM

Dumb has meant stupid since the 16C; its descendants and peers include dum-dum, dumb-ass, dumb-bell, dumbellina, dumb fuck, dumbhead, dumbo, dummy (19C) and dumbski. Apart from those terms including Tom that are cited above, slang fools include Tom Coney (17C, coney meaning both rabbit and the

simpleton who can be gulled by the coney-catcher\*), Tom-far-thing (17C, farthing being a general term for worthless), Tom Fool (tom being a general term meaning man) and Tom towly.

## **INSANE AND CRAZY**

As well as the many terms meaning fool or simpleton slang has a wide vocabulary for dealing with those who are deemed to have stumbled one step further from reality: the crazy or insane. Predictably, few such terms pay even lip-service to political correctness; this is not the world of the 'differently abled'. What is perhaps worthier of note is the fact that although this vocabulary stretches over four centuries, surprisingly little has been discarded.

The oldest of such terms, cuckoo, which can be found in Shakespeare's Henry IV, pt. II (1600), is a perfect exemplar. So too is barmy (17C), which comes from SE barm: yeast and implies a brain bubbling over with manic energy. Barmy leads in turn to the 19C balmy, with an additional reference to the SE balmy: soft. Both terms are linked in the rhy. sl. lakes (of Killarney), which in turn leads to the 20C lakesy: mad. Cracked (17C) is yet another vintage term, abbreviating cracked in the head, and leading to the 20C crackers and cracko. In many ways the most interesting is rum, which other than in deliberate archaisms such as rum cove (an odd fellow) is a term that has barely survived. Rum began as an all-purpose 16C cant term meaning good (see GOOD for a full etymology); yet a century later, c.1774, it had been transformed into odd or eccentric. The precise reason for this reverse is debatable; Partridge suggests, plausibly, that rum, as a gypsy term and indeed in the spelling rom actually meaning gypsy, might have been branded with the same opprobrium as was accruing to the gypsies and thus, while the underworld might still see it as 'good', the larger world came to associate it with more negative qualities.

The prolific slang coiners of the 19C came up with a number of new terms; once again the majority are still in wide use. They included daffy (fr. Northern dial. daff: a simpleton and cognate with SE daft), dotty (fr. dotty: weak in the legs) with its fake-Latin intensifiers dottima: slightly and dottissima: very mad), gaga (first used by Rudyard Kipling in the 1880s; it comes from the French gateux: an old man so feeble as to be incontinent, and also means drunk), gone (abbr. gone in the head), and half-cracked, half-gone and half-there. Funny abbreviated funny in the head, the first instance of 'funny peculiar' rather than 'funny ha-ha'; loco (US), was originally applied by cowboys to cattle that had eaten locoweed: marijuana; its extreme version plumb loco played on the 15C plumb, from 'plum ripe', meaning completely, utterly. Screwy referred to the early 19C have a screw loose, as did loose up top; the 20C unglued merely alters the category of weakened link, apartments to let also implied a certain emptiness in 'the upper storey'. Loony (abbrev. of lunatic) was a forerunner of the 1980s loony tune: a crazy person; Loony Tunes was the name of a series of film cartoons created by the team of Hollywood animators Hanna-Barbera; fittingly the term was popularised by another Hollywood star, Ronald Reagan, to describe such figures as the Libyan leader Colonel Gaddaffi. Loopy played on looby\*: a fool, or the Scots loopy: crafty; non compos abbreviated the legal term non compos mentis (of unsound mind), whacky (fr. the Yorks. dial. whacky: a dolt) led to the 20C whack-a-doo, whacked out and whacko; like its modern incarnation kinky meant not straight, but without the slightest sexual overtone.

'Infestation' of the brains gives a small sub-group: bats in the belfry (19C) generates bathouse, batty, bats and batshit (all 20C); once transported to the Antipodes the bats become rats (which originally meant simply delirium tremens, the DTs), as in in the rats, rathouse, rats in the upper storey, rats in the garret, rats in the attic and rats in the loft. One can also have maggots in one's head (19C), although maggotty means drunk in the UK, and irritated in Australia. The 20C bughouse (US) continues the imagery, with the variations bugs, bugs in the brain, crazy as a bed-bug and bugsy, a term immortalised in the nickname of gangster Benjamin 'Bugsy'Siegel (1906-47), New York hoodlum

and the pioneer of Las Vegas. Living on a worm farm substitutes invertebrates for insects or rodents, but the meaning remains.

The 20C adds all over the board, around the bend with the punning harpic (fr. the detergent's copyline: 'clean around the bend'), mental (1913; fr. mental case, mental defective) with its rhy. sl. synonym radio (fr. radio rental). Crazy-arse, crazy-ass and wild and wild-ass and buck-wild (AA) all denote serious instability, as does apeshit (fr. go ape: to lose control); bananas (fr. go bananas) is a harder variation on its earlier definition: to go mushy (as in a ripe banana) with emotion and excitement. More 20C terms include dippy (possibly from dipsomaniac: an alcoholic), doofus (US), dopey, dorky (fr. dork\* = prick\* = fool), freaky (with the inference that the madness is drug-related), kooky (US), lamebrained (fr. lamebrain\*: a fool), meshugge (Yid. fr. Heb. meshuga: insane), neuro (abbrev. neurotic) and schitzi (abbrev. schizophrenic, coined in 1910 and used, with little regard for its precise origins, as a blanket description of insanity). Nuts, a core term, is rooted in off one's nut\* (19C, nut: head) and gives nutso, nutty and nutty as a fruitcake (itself a synonym). Squirrelly plays on nuts, and a squirrel was briefly US slang for a psychoanalyst: each patient is a 'nut'. Potty was coined in the 19C, when it meant indifferent, shaky or unpromising; the intimations of lunacy are a 20C addition. Bonkers was popularised in 1964, when the Tory grandee Quintin Hogg, ridiculing Labour leader Harold Wilson's much-touted proletarian origins, declared, 'If the British public falls for this, I say it will be stark, staring bonkers.' Wig City, wigged out and wiggy all come from flip one's wig, wired has drug overtones - one is 'strung too tight' - as do twisted and weird, while wires crossed refers simply to faulty electrics. Toey (Aus.) was originally used of an unstable horse, endlessly shuffling its feet. A space case refers either to one's losing a grip on down-to-earth reality (cf. airhead\*), or the 'space' that such sufferers metaphorically have between their ears.

Colonialism and the military have a small sub-vocabulary of madness, gleaned from the overseas postings that could leave a man seriously debilitated by the tropical conditions. Thus asiatic, originated by the US Marine Corps, troppo (fr. tropical), an Australian

invention, and, most celebrated of all, doolally, coined in the late 19C by Britain's Indian Army, and still extant, at least amongst Londoners. The term, in full doolally tap (fr. Hindi tap: fever), comes from the Deolali military sanitorium in Bombay, to which the mentally ill troops were sent. However, according to the veteran Frank Richards, writing in his memoir Old Soldier Sahib (1936) the illness came not before one arrived at Deolalie, but during one's stay there. Time-expired troops were sent to the sanatorium to await the next troop-ship home. It was during the long hot days of tedium that men, formerly first-class soldiers, might gradually go to pieces. Anyone who did 'queer things', was characterised as having the doolally tap. A later, and much rarer term is the Balkan tap, characterizing the growing, happy indolence that took over men involved in the World War I Macedonian campaign.

Other asylums give their own particular terms: yarra comes from the Australian institution at Yarra Bend, Victoria, go Yarmouth from the Royal Naval hospital at Great Yarmouth and winnick from the asylum at Winwick, Lancs.

The core term not all there (19C) has generated many synonyms, some of which, but by no means all, are listed here. They include not quite there (19C), not having both oars in the water (20C), not playing with a full deck, (20C) not the full quid (Aus.) or ten pence short of the full quid, two pence short of a bob, five annas shot of the rupee, two bricks short of the load, two wafers short of a communion, only eighty pence in the pound, one shingle short, the Australian equivalent of having a tile loose (19C), one sandwich short of the picnic, a couple of chips short of a fish dinner, cruising with one's lights on, (20C) lights on but nobody home (20C), out to lunch, to have lost one's all one's marbles, and have a few of one's pages stuck together.

The basic, and interchangeable terms out of one's head and off one's head give the variations off one's bean, off one's chump, off one's trolley, off one's head (19C), off one's kadoove (19C, an aborigine term which was taken from cady or kadi: a hat), out of one's box, out of one's cake, out of one's chump (19C), out of one's gourd, out of one's nut (19C), out of one's onion

(20C), out of one's tree, off the rails, off one's rocker (19C), off the beam, off the wall, off-beat, off-brand, out of whack, and on the edge. Off and out of can be substituted for each where grammatically relevant. Out of left field comes from the game of baseball and, like any term using 'left', implies something not quite right, or at least, given the position of left field as it relates to a right-handed batter, out of the main area of interest.

Finally, a mental hospital can be a bin, booby hatch (the reference to the notorious north London asylum at Colney Hatch may in fact be coincidental) or booby hutch (19C, the term also meant a police station), bughouse, crazy house, funny farm, loony bin, nut hatch or nut house.

## SPEECH AND TALK

Other than the logical divisions by part of speech, and even these can elide, with single words serving as both noun and verb, drawing the fine lines between the way a given slang term is used in the area of speech and talk is at best difficult and at worst pointless. All is determined by context; slang by its nature is far more fluid than is standard English; never more so than in terms relating to speech.

## SPEECH AND TALK

Blab and its verb forms blab and, apparently blabber, are the first slang terms relating to speech and can be found as such in the 17C. Their history, however, is somewhat older. There is even, according to the OED, a question over whether what appears to be an obvious link even exists. Blab, then spelt blabbe and meaning a 'chatterer' occurs in Chaucer c. 1374, blab meaning simply 'chatter' or 'loose talk' can be found in The Tale of Beryn (c. 1400), but then promptly vanishes until the 16C. when it is augmented by a verb form, blab: to chatter (1535); this in turn creates a noun blabber: a chatterer. However the verb blabber predates all these; it occurs in Piers Ploughman (1362), and with its noun blabberer is common in the

works of John Wyclif (1330-84). Thus, however tempting it may seem, one cannot simply assume that **blab** is a 14C abbreviation of **blabber**. Instead, the OED suggests, it is related to the noun labbe: a revealer of secrets' in Chaucer, and the verb labbe in Piers Ploughman and to labbyng: open-mouthed,' It can also be linked to the Old Dutch labben: to chatter. Thus **blab/blabbe** might be a mixture of labbe and **blabber**; but might also be simply onomatopoeic. Whatever the root, the terms appeared often during the 16C and 17C (at which point **blab** began to be rated as colloquial rather than SE), but had been consigned to slang by the 18C.

Two of the 18C's terms refer to the body: gab comes from gab, meaning mouth, which is in turn a development of the earlier gob\*; jaw is a variation on the SE jaw, and means especially a lecture; the 19C pi-jaw, pi being short for pious, is an earnest exhortation aimed at schoolchildren. The reduplicated jaw-jaw is a 20C creation, most famously used by the then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan who declared on January 30, 1958, 'Jaw Jaw is better than war-war', a line that echoed his predecessor Winston Churchill's comment to President Eisenhower at the White House on January 26, 1954: 'Talking jaw to jaw is better than going to war'. A third 18C term is rap, which originally meant to swear an oath against someone; it languished thereafter until the 1960s, when it was exhumed with a new emphasis, to speak deeply and sincerely, often of one's innermost feelings; thus a rap session was a form of informal therapy. Apparently consigned to the psychobabble of the New Age rap gained a third identity in the 1980s when it came to describe a style of Black music, also known as hip-hop, pioneered in New York and spreading to the West Coast, in which performers spoke rather than sang their lyrics (often highly political or sexual, and defined by the concerns of teenage life in the inner city ghetto) against a simple backing track.

The 19C has the rhy. sl. Duke of York (talk), snaffle (especially 'shop', and derived from the E. Anglian dial. snaffle: to talk non-sense), luff, pishery-pashery, and jibb (fr. jibb: the tongue, and giving the 20C jibb in: to talk one's way in, to gatecrash). Gaff meant an outcry or simply a cry, becoming a conversation in the 20C and giving the 19C blow the gaff: to tell a secret; gas carries

an implication of verbosity (cf. hot air, wind) and gives all gas and gaiters, the name of a once-popular clerical sitcom. Guff, from the SE guff: a puff or whiff, and synonymous with gush and tosh, is equally skewed towards verbal nonsense; it may also relate to the Anglo-India gup or gup-gup: idle gossip, from Hindi gap: prattle, which borrowed in turn from the Turkish gep or geb: word, saying or talk and the Persian guftan or guptan: to say. The word made its way to England c.1868, the year in which a highly critical account of South Indian society was published, under the pseudonym of 'Gup'. The word also reached Australia, where gup means a fool. Patter, in the 18C the equivalent of jargon (i.e. professional and occupational slang), meant glib talk, especially that of showmen (cf. spruik), but could also mean a judicial summing up and theatrical lyrics.

Rabbit (rhy. sl. rabbit and pork: talk) and the cognate bunny (rabbit) appear in the 20C, as does the backslang kaylack, tonguewagging, broadcasting, yap (a development of 19C yap: to prattle on, cf. wasse) and mouth music (cf. chin music). This latter, according to Scotland Yard's then D.A.C. David Powis, writing in the glossary included in The Signs of Crime (1977) is also 'a taboo and gross expression meaning the practice of cunnilingus. Never used in mixed or family company'. Crack, usually the crack is an Anglo-Irish term, although it comes from the 19C Scots crack: a friendly chat or bragging and tends to be used in reference to the enjoyment to be gained from an event as distinct from the ostensible meaning of the event itself. Other 20C coinages are the Afro-American ji-jibe (fr. jib; unimportant chatter) and fat lip (unpleasant talk); a blooper (an embarrassing public verbal error; possibly from a mixture of blab\* and the exclamation oops!); and a beef (a complaint), which Partridge suggests comes from the theatrical term meaning to shout or yell but the OED attributes to US farming, both terms appear during the 1880s.

## **CHATTER AND GOSSIP**

Although a number of the terms listed above can mean chatter or idle talk, and are often found as such, those listed below are more

specifically related to 'hot air'. The 16C jabber, which these days is more likely to mean unrestrained, even unintelligible talk rather than gossip comes from jibb: the tongue; cackle (17C) comes from the verb meaning to reveal secrets through indiscreet talk, gum (18C, fr. the gums in one's mouth and thus the mouth itself) gives the 20C combination beat the gums, while mag (18C) is an abbreviation of the 'gossipy' magpie whose chattering, according to various ancient authorities betokens evil tidings or at best the arrival of a stranger; its bad reputation (dating back at least to the Middles Ages) is based on the belief that alone of all birds the magpie did not enter the Ark with Noah, preferring instead to sit outside 'jabbering over the drowned world' (William Henderson Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties [1866]). Chatter is further suggested in wind, gas and hot air (all from the emptiness of the words), gush (19C, words springing up like a fountain), burble (see verb below), blather (possibly fr. blat\*), tosh and its probable root bosh, a direct borrowing of the Turk bosh: empty or worthless; the word became current in English after the appearance of Morier's best-selling novel Ayesha (1834). Poker talk (19C) is fireside chit-chat (fr. the poker), and scanmag (19C) comes from scandalum magnum: the 'scandal of magnates'. This old legal term dates back to a statute of King Richard II which forbade anyone from publishing a malicious report against any person holding a position of dignity.

Two musical terms have been adopted by the 20C: jazz (hence the phrase all that jazz) and slightly later jive both were used in a non-musical sense to mean 'misleading, untrue, empty, or pretentious' talk, a comment perhaps on the intolerance of those who failed to appreciate the musics in question. Other terms include bull (thus bull session: a male get-together; cf. bullshit), dribble (fr. SE) and schmooze (see verb, below). Yack or yak and natter have both been adopted from earlier dialect terms: yack (and thus yakety-yak) originally meant fast and meaningless talk (and is still found as such), while natter, now a neutral chat or discussion, comes from the 19C gnatter: to grumble, to complain, to be peevish or querulous; or to talk or gossip in an unfriendly manner.

#### SMOOTH TALK AND DECEPTION

Blarney (18C) is perhaps the epitome of slang terms meaning smooth talk. It comes from Blarney, a village near Cork in Ireland, which has a castle in which lies an inscribed stone. The stone is hard to approach and the popular belief is that any one who kisses this 'Blarney stone' will ever after be gifted with a persuasive, plausible tongue. Thus blarney has become synonymous with smoothly flattering or cajoling talk; it can also mean outright nonsense. Similar properties have accrued to gammon (possibly from the SE verb to game) which has also been defined as chatter (18C) and nonsense (19C). Apple sauce (19C) and banana oil (20C) are both notably smooth; eyewash is a former army term, meaning anything, e.g. washing the eyes, that is done for effect rather than for any practical purpose. Like blarney bunk, bunkum, buncombe and bunkum (19C, US) stem from geography in this case Buncombe County in N. Carolina. The word emerged during the debate on the 'Missouri Question' in 1821 when one Felix Walker, the member from this district rose to speak. Although the debate was due to end and members begged him to sit down, he refusing, explaining that his constituents expected it, and that he was bound 'to make a speech for Buncombe.' The term stuck, first as buncombe, then bunkum, then, as abbreviated by the satirist George Ade, bunk. Thus Henry Ford's celebrated dictum 'History is bunk,' and Harold Laski's mordant assessment of the obituary business: 'De mortuis nil nisi bunkum.'

The sceptical 20C has other terms. Bullshit is bluntest, sometimes modified to bull or BS, but it far from alone. Chat implies seduction, as does its coarser amplification bumchat; SE chat means simply talk and underlies another combination, backchat, meaning cheek or impudence. Seduction is also central to line, although its roots are in the SE line of goods, and thus presumes something to 'sell'; the con (fr. SE confidence trick) is self-explanatory, and comeon can apply to swindlers or lotharios\*; soap and soft soap and flannel all imply 'cleaning up' one's words; in the 19C flannel meant the ornate, scroll-ridden letterheads with which tradesmen garlanded the invoices they sent to their aristocratic clients; there

oil or the old oil makes things go more smoothly, a snow job blankets the hearer with a smooth coating (like untrampled snow); spiel is based on the German spiel: to talk and is synonymous with patter or line; so too is riff fr. SE riff: a simple musical phrase repeated over and over. Britain's West Indian population talk of speeching while Afro-Americans prefer a spit-bit.

Sob stuff (thus sob sister: agony aunt and sob story) is a story intended to persuade through pity and soft sawder (19C) means flattery; the term comes from SE sawder, solder, which smooths over the cracks. A number of phrases are based on the verb come the...; they all imply deception and often insert 'old'. Thus come the artful (19C, hoax, deceive), come the acid (exaggerate or speak sarcastically), come the blarney over (19C), come the bludge on (20C Aus, cf. bludge), come the gammon (19C, wheedle), come the cunt (20C, be obnoxious or obstreperous), come the raw prawn (Aus. 20C), come the tin man (20C, to deceive) and (perhaps the best known) come the old soldier (19C, to malinger). A number of nouns meaning smooth talk also pass muster as verbs, typically blarney, oil and flannel; other such verbs include apply the oil, pour on the oil, feed a line or hand and hand out a line, schmooze (Yiddish, from Hebrew: schmuos: things heard, thus rumours) snow and snow under.

## OTHER TALK

More references to ways of speaking include beating the gums (20C), going on or going on at (19C) and wanking or wanking on (20C), all of which mean complaining or whingeing. A remark can be a crack (20C, but meant a lie in the 17C), a wisecrack (a joke), and three terms which imply the verbal 'trumping' of another speaker: capper (US 20C, which 'caps' the previous comment), zinger (20C, fr zing: energy) and whammy (20C, best known for the phrase double whammy, as touted by the British Conservative party during the General Election of 1992). Articulacy can be the gift of the gab (18C) a development of the gift of the gob (17C); the former term also meant to have a wide mouth. Finally

pipe, meaning a voice (17C) gives the verb pipe: to talk, open one's pipes: to sing, set up one's pipes: to yell (both 17C); pipe down: to be quiet or, as an exclamation be quiet! and pipe up: to speak more audibly (all 19C and based on the Royal Navy's use of pipes to signify orders).

#### THE TALKER

Tending as it does to point up one's failings rather than to laud one's virtues, slang's terms for talker emphasize the negative. It is the gossip, the bore, the slanderer and the braggart who gain slang's attention; the mellifluous orator must turn to standard English, as he or she does for their vocabulary, for suitable encomiums.

Tongue-pad (17C) is based on footpad\*, and, meaning a smooth and not wholly trustworthy talker, is about as reputable; a tongue-padder is a lawyer, an invariably dubious character in slang; a blab (17C) is likely to talk indiscreetly, and a tub thumper (17C), originally describing a ranting preacher, was soon extended to apply to any over-enthusiastic speaker. Bag of wind, windbag, blowhard, gasbag and gasser are all 19C and all mean loudmouth (20C). A chaff-cutter (19C fr. chaff: to boast) is a slanderer or an overly knowing talker. A spruiker (Aus. 20C, fr. Dutch spreker. to speak) is a loud talker, specifically a sideshow barker); the Afro-American storefront preacher (20C) preaches only to those who idle away their days outside the general store of some small US town. A tummler (Yiddish, fr. German tummel: noise, tumult) is a noisy person, thus the life and soul of the party, and specifically the paid social director of one of the Jewish hotels in what was known as the Borscht Belt, the Catskill Mountain resorts of New York state. The barrack-room lawyer or the jailhouse lawyer (19C) are both self-taught experts; in the larger world the terms are synonymous with whinger; the 19C bubbly jock rhymed with turkey cock and implied a turkey's characteristics: strutting and making too much noise; the Bubbly Jocks are the Royal Scots Greys, whose rival regiments equated them with the farmyard bird. Catolla (19C) meant a noisy person, possibly linked to caterwaul; a dish queen (20C, gay use) is a notably

slanderous person while **Tom Long** (17C) is a bore, telling long and tedious stories with little point and no end. The term comes from the proverbial figure: 'John Long (16C) or Tom Long (17C) the carrier who will never do his errand'.

Dedicated gossips include the tattle-tale, tattle-basket, prattle-box, the tattlebox or tittle tattle (18C), the rattlebag, rattle-bladder, rattle-brain, rattle-cap, rattle-head, rattlepate and rattle-skull (19C); the blabbermouth, gatemouth, motormouth, sack mouth (AA, cf. satchel-mouth, the nickname of the jazz superstar Satchmo, or Louis Armstrong), mixer, stirrer, shit-stirrer and shit-disturber (all 20C). The whistleblower (20C) tells very specific tales: usually those which a given authority or establishment would prefer to keep covered up; the image is of a referee, blowing the whistle to stop the game after an infringement of the rules. One who uses an excess of obscene language is a garbage mouth or sewermouth (20C); a barker or pitchman can also be a gee man (Aus., he gees people up) or a spruiker (Aus., fr. spruik); a teller of tales or an exaggerator is bull artist, bullshit artist or bullshitter (all 20C), a slickster (20C, AA), a smoothie (20C, fr. his smooth talk) and a wind-up merchant (20C, fr. the image of winding up a mechanical toy; the original 19C meaning was to get a racehorse fit for the next race). Talkative people are variously all mouth, full of it (it = shit\*), gabby, gassy, gobby, mouthy, yappy and long-tongued.

## TOTALK

Verbs meaning to talk are as dependant on context as are nouns. They are also, as has been noted, interchangeable, and in a number of cases the reader should seek the etymology above.

Aside from blab (which seems capable of appearing in every grammatical guise) the 16C has blow, meaning speak angrily and giving, a century later, blow upon: to inform against; cut (16C) has the image of cutting out a selection of words to make one's speech, thus the 19C cut a joke. Warble (17C) comes from the SE term meaning to swing sweetly (of birds); latterly it has meant confess, synonymous with sing. Cackle (17C, see noun above)

gives the 20C cackle one's fat: to brag. Gab, jaw and jib (still used by black Americans) all come from the human anatomy (see nouns, above); gas similarly mimics its use as a noun and the subsequent career of rap has already been outlined. Spin a yarn (18C) is originally a Royal Naval term, and implies the telling of a tale, 'tall' or otherwise; palaver (to converse, and thus as a noun: conversation; 19C Scots defines it as a fussy person or busybody) comes either from the Portuguese palavra or Spanish palabra: both words meaning talk and first coined to describe the pidgins that were employed by early explorers to communicate with the natives of the African coast. To palarie comes from a mixture of palaver and Parlyaree, the Italianate stage language.

If warble is a term common to the sort of proto-fascist bestsellers embodied in the adventures of that clubland hero Captain Bulldog Drummond, usually attributed to whichever hapless untermensch the hero is currently 'persuading' to confess, then Drummond himself will never speak when he can burble (usually 'genially'), a term onomatopoeically although (attests the OED) not etymologically linked to the Italian borbogliare: to make a rumbling or grumbling noise. It also finds echoes in the Portuguese borbulhar or Spanish borbollar, to bubble forth. Drummond (or at least his creator) is more likely to have picked up his use from the popularity that it gathered following Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass (1871) in which The Jabberwock... 'came whiffling through the tulgey wood, And burbled as it came!' Something, surely, of a nonce-word is gladstonize, meaning to evade and prevaricate, and to talk much and mean nothing. The term, cited in Farmer and Henley, derives from W. E. Gladstone (1809-98), four times Prime Minister and the 'Grand Old Man' of the Liberal Party.

More recent terms include beat the gums and break one's chops, bat the breeze (mid-20°C Aus. although the 18°C breeze meant an argument), the rhy. sl. rabbit (and thus bunny), chew the fat, chew the rag (fr. rag: tongue) and chew the grease, dish (to slander, usu. gay use) and thus today's diss (primarily teen use; an abbrev. of SE disrespect). Go (as in 'I go...and she goes...') can serve as say or speak, as can spill a line (fr. spill: confess), shoot a line and shoot the breeze; sound off means to get annoyed; its

parallel use, in the US army, is to count in cadence while marching; spiel and yap are dealt with above.

To talk fast, and usually meaninglessly is to flash the tongue or flash the patter (19C), to yaffle (19C, from Yorks. dial. to yelp or mumble), to talk nine words at once (17C), to talk nineteen to the dozen (19C) and to talk thirteen to the dozen. To talk forty to the dozen (19C) gives the adjectives forty-jawed and forty-lunged. As well as certain terms, typically burble, jaw, beat one's gums, gab and gas, all of which have appeared in other contexts, terms meaning to talk lengthily, repetitiously and perhaps angrily include go off (at the mouth), pop off (at), run off at the mouth, shoot blanks (AA), and shoot off (at one's mouth) most of which are 19C and all of which are informed by the image of firing a gun. Bang on, in which tedium is substituted for anger, is equally aggressive, the Yiddish shpritz (fr. German schpritz: to spray) typifies a scattershot delivery, while blow, blow off and blow off steam (19C) refer to the the steam engine. To go on is just what it appears, although bend one's ear (20C, part-punning on lend an ear) is more metaphorical. Flap at the jibs (20C) underlines the way in which the older jib\* is still used among Afro-Americans. Spout or spout off has elements of the unrestrained fountain (cf. gush), waffle (19C) was printers' jargon, meaning nonsense; it is also dialect for the bark of small dog (cf. yak), woof (AA) continues the canine imagery, as does yawp (fr. yap). Talk the hind leg off a donkey (19C) has contemporary variants: the hind legs in question are those of a cow, a bird or a horse, while a modern variation is talk a blue streak.

## TO CHATTER

Cut, Duke of York, mag, pipe, rap, warble, cackle and crack have been considered above; and again, one must stress the invidiousness of attempting to divide chatter from 'normal' talk. Still, the terms that follow have some claim to being grouped together.

Cant, the thieves' jargon of the 16C and 17C, which has been considered elsewhere in its role as the basis of slang, has a further meaning, that of empty talk, of idle chatter. It is with reference to

this type of cant that Samuel Johnson declared in May 1783, 'Clear your *mind* of cant.' In this context it has no bearing on the criminal world, but should traced back to the word's use, as early as the 12C, as a pejorative description of church services that were condemned as substituting rote mouthings for real devotion. It was this use that led to criminal use of **cant**, the language of the **canting crew\*** or itinerant criminal beggars. Here **cant** echoed the whining tones in which they 'chanted' for alms. The other branch of **cant**, vapid if sententious verbiage, while certainly rooted in the same Latin *cantare*: to sing, is a later coinage, often associated with two 17C Presbyterian ministers: Andrew Cant and his son Alexander.

Gabble, coined during the 16C on the basis of gab: mouth, began life as SE, but had become slang by the 19C, while jabber (16C, a mix perhaps of gabble and SE gibber) was always slang, as were wag the red rag (17C, from red rag: tongue) and confab (18C). Body parts appear yet again to underpin chin and chinwag (19C) and clack (19C, fr. clack, meaning: tongue [16C], prattler and busybody [17C] and thus the 19C clack-box: mouth). Chow (19C) was primarily theatrical. Flam (19C) comes from flam: a sham story or hoax; its 20C descendents include flame: to exaggerate or bore, and flim-flam: to trick or swindle; flam may also have links to the Scots flamfew: a trifle). Flummox (19C) meaning to perplex is an abbrev. of flummox by the lip: to talk down. It probably comes from a dialectal origin, notably flummocks: to maul, mangle; flummock: a slovenly person or flummock: to make untidy, disorder, to confuse, bewilder. There is also an onomatopoeic element based on throwing down roughly and untidily; as such the term is reminiscent of flump: a hummock, and slommock: a sloven.

Other 19C terms include the verbs to jerk chin music (US), to ladle (19C theatrical: to enunciate slowly and solemnly: from ladling soup); to mang (fr. mag\* and from the Romany mang: to beg) and slam (cf. slum) both mean additionally to boast; to slum is to talk nonsense (cf. slum: fake jewellery and slum: the Romany language). To slang was, logically, enough, to speak slang, but by the 19C it meant also to abuse, thus slanging-match. Voker and rocker both mean to speak, specifically to speak tramps' jargon. The words come from the Romany meaning to talk; that in turn

is based on Latin *vocare*: to speak. To give green rats (19C) was to backbite (fr. green implying envy), to chirp (20C) is also to inform (as is sing), to chuck it out is to speak without restraint (fr. chuck: to vomit) and to give some lip is to be cheeky.

#### IN OTHER WORDS

Finally, a run through those types of speech hitherto left undiscussed: whispering, shouting, abusing, speaking honestly and so on.

To whisper is to blow down one's ear, and to talk out of the side of one's neck (cf. talk out of the back of one's neck); to speak without expression is to deadpan (fr. pan: the face). To bloviate (US mid-19C), blow hard (19C) blow off at the mouth (19C) and blow off steam all mean to talk loudly or aggressively, as do talk big (late 17C), thery (19C, presumed to be Romany, but possibly a corruption of SE theory), blat (fr. 18C blate or bleet: to roar or talk wildly), blart (fr. blate or possibly SE blurt), ballyhoo (coined early 20C to describe a fairground barker's touting speech), broadcast (20C), loudmouth (20C) and sound off. To make a remark, whether complimentary or otherwise, is to crack, cut loose (cf. cut) or let loose, dish, out with, spew or spew out, shoot, shoot one's wad (which also means ejaculate in a sexual sense) and sing one's song. To become abusive is to curse out, cuss down (late 20C), get down dirty (AA), slag off (mid-19C, cf. slag\*); to emphasise maliciously is to rub in.

To talk sincerely is to make no bones or make no bones about, a phrase that originated in the 16C, as to find no bones in this matter; both phrases imply the absence of bones in a soup or stew; similar examples of straight talk can be found in come flat out with (fr. SE come out with), come out strong (19C), be one hundred per cent (20C), get down to brass tacks (early 20C, probably from rhy. sl. brass tacks: facts), pull no punches and take the gloves off (20C, from boxing), put one's cards on the table and show one's (hole-)card (20C, both from cards, specifically poker), rap on the real (AA, cf. rap), shoot straight and shoot straight from the shoulder (20C), take no prisoners (20C), talk turkey (the image is of a turkey being central to a

Christmas dinner, and thus to talk of the basic issue), get down to the nitty-gritty (20°C, cf. nitty-gritty\*) and touch base with. This term, rooted in baseball, initially reflected the touching of bases as one runs between them and as such meant to encounter or meet; in this context base means the bottom or the deepest point, and thus implies talking of important matters. The phrase on one's say-so (19°C) means on trust and comes from the 18°C on my sammy say-so: on my word of honour.

To talk cleverly is to come the smart arse (20C, with negative implications, cf. smart ass), to crack wise, (20C US, cf. crack, wise and wisecrack), to deliver the goods (20C), and to talk like a book (20C). To talk like the back of a cigarette card (20C) is to pretend to greater knowledge than one has: the reference is to the cards that were once supplied in every pack of cigarettes and which carried a picture on one side and text -adescription, a potted biography - on the other. To start talking, especially as an injunction to do so, is to fire away (18C), out or out with it or to shoot (20C); shoot has been attributed to film use, but in this context (and underlined by fire away) the firing of a gun would seem more likely. To interrupt is to butt in (19C), to chip in (19C, fr. putting one's gambling chips on table to signify one's joining in the round of betting) and to pick up fag ends (20C, fr. late 19C fag: a non Turkish, i.e. cheap cigarette); to pull one's coat (20C) is to attract someone's attention.

To hit the button, say a mouthful, strike home, and touch base all mean to to talk aptly, while the offering of an opinion generates to cop an attitude, to put in one's two cents, to say one's piece and to sound off or sound off about. To speak foolishly is to go off half-cocked, put one's foot in it (18C), put one's foot in one's mouth (20C, thus foot-in-mouth disease: a propensity for gaffes), to shovel the shit (20C; cf shit-stirrer) and to make a bloomer (19C, fr. blooming error, cf. 20C blooper: a blunder, usually in a media/political context). To talk nonsense is to talk Hebrew or to talk Greek (both 17C, both playing on the unintelligibility of the languages) and to talk through the back of one's neck or talk through one's arse). To tell off, scold or reprimand is to comb one's hair (18C) or

comb one's noddle with a three-legged stool (16C, but usually meaning to thrash or beat and found as such in Shakespeare), to dress down (17C, also to beat), to give a curtain lecture (17C, the lecture given by a wife to her husband when they are in bed, cf. SE curtain-sermon; the curtain is that of their four-poster), to give a juniper- (17C) or jiniper-lecture (18C, the terms come from the sharpness of the juniper berry); to carpet (19C, the miscreant is standing on his or her superior's office carpet while receiving a reprimand), to walk the carpet (19C, servants were summoned into the parlour to be told off) and to give a wigging (early 19C, from wig: a severe reprimand). An earwigging was a rebuke delivered in private (19C, cf. wigging, and earwig: to whisper insinuations); a jobation or jawbation (19C, from 17C jobe or job: a tedious scolding, which comes from the lengthy scolding given to Job by his supposed 'comforters'; the word might also have links with jaw\*). To tear a strip off (20C) is based on the noise made when one tears off a strip of cloth; it sounds like a raspberry (or farting noise). To boast (see synonyms above, plus terms at braggart, below) is to chant the poker (19C, to exaggerate, cf. poker talk?) and to vapour (cf. hot air, wind and thus the 20C computer jargon vapourware: software or hardware that is announced with much publicity, but never actually appears.

To chi-ike (19C) is to praise in Britain but to cheek in Australia; a gun is a lie (17C) or a rumour (19C) and hackslaver (19C, fr. SE hack: to stammer) is to stutter. Cheek or impudence is lip (20C), slack-jaw, stock (18C, from a stock of impudence) or sauce; a cheeky person is a nash-gab (19C) from Romany nash: to run, and thus someone who runs off at the gab, or mouth) or a saucebox (fr. sauce). Terms meaning be quiet! or shut up! include mum's the word! (18C, fr 16C mum: silence), nantee parlaree and nantee palaver (both mid 19C, from lingua franca nantee: none or not; itself taken from Italian niente: nothing).

## THE BRAGGART

Defined as he is by his words, which exceed by far his non-existent deeds, the braggart is truly the word made flesh. Indeed, he is

nothing more. The earliest slang synonym is cutter (16C, cf. cut, thus swear like a cutter) following by roarer (16C, fr. roar: to riot), hector (17C, fr. the Trojan hero) and mouth (17C) which gives its successor the mouth almighty (19C). With proper disrespect the braggart is linked unashamedly to excrement: the 20C has bullshitter and bullshit artist, but there are many precedents: cacafuego (17C, lit. shit fire), shitefire, fire-eater (19C), pump-thunder (19C, fr. pump: to fart) and pissfire (18C). All wind and piss (19C) comes from the 18C proverb: 'like the barber's cat: all wind and piss'); similar phrases include all mouth and trousers and all prick and breeches (both 20C). Other 17C synonyms include the literary furioso, dammy-boy or damme-boy (fr. damme: generic for the oaths he likes to use) and petronel (fr. SE petronel: a kind of large pistol or carbine, used in the 16C and early 17C). Captain Grand, Captain Bounce, Captain Bluff and Captain Hackum are 18C coinages; all mock the bully's military pretensions; hackum alone means braggart as does bouncer (17C, meaning liar in the 18C).

The 19C, concentrating more on his exaggerations than on his threats of violence offers barker, blower (Aus.), windbag, gasser (the 20C alternative use of gasser: someone or something amusing probably comes from the Irish phrase great gas: lots of fun), gasman and gasbag, huff, huffcap and huffer (thus huffy: angry or touchy etc and huff: anger or bluster). Ramper comes from ramp: to roar and rage. A Tooley-Street tailor supposedly refers to three tailors of Tooley Street (SE1) who supposedly put together a petition to Parliament; it carried none but their own signatures but was headed grandiosely: 'We the people of England...'. Blatherskite (19C, Aus) comes from the 16C bletherskate: a mix of blether: bluster and SE skate: to slide over. 20C Australia adds big note artist (fr. big note: to speak highly of) and ear-basher (also meaning a bore). Other terms include bigmouth, loudmouth and fatmouth, blowhard, bilge artist (fr. bilge water: nonsense), smart arse or ass and smart guy, swellhead, wise-ass, wise guy, wisenheimer and the man with a paper ass (AA).

## **INSULTS**

With its relentless deflation of the pompous and its ribald attitude to the underpinnings of the status quo, it is unsurprising that slang lends itself enthusiastically to insults. Not all are listed here: racist slurs, criticisms of those who are, for instance, primarily drunkards or beggars can be found at the appropriate section. Certain descriptions, as in many of the terms used to describe women, are *de facto* insults. These terms may be considered both as general insults and as descriptions of those who might be termed 'unsympathetic'.

#### SIXTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Aside from the ranks of thieves, mendicant criminal beggars, fornicators, and other ne'erdowells, the names of all of whom form the basis of the ur-slang cant and are duly listed elsewhere, the 16C throws up a couple of terms that have lasted until the present day. A pettifogger was literally a second rate lawyer, condemned by his inadequacies to dealing only in minor cases. The subterfuges used to win these cases gave such men the reputation of trickery and of sharp practice; the term duly lost its legal status, and became instead a generalised insult. The petty element is obvious, the fogger has a more complex background. It comes from the name Fugger, the great Augsburg banking family of the 15th and 16th centuries, which appears (usually with the u changed to an o) in a number of European languages meaning initially a merchant, usurer or monopolist and subsequently an avaricious rich man, a cheap huckster, and anyone who uses corrupt methods for personal gain. The term persist today: the Dutch fokker, the Walloon foukeur and Spanish fúcar are all contemptuous designations for a man of great wealth. Thus the petty- or pettifogger was one whose methods emulated those of the great merchants, but at the lowest level. The second 16C term is ragamuffin, a mix of rag meaning ragged or disreputable, and the suffix -muffin, which offers no discernible etymology; the term first appeared in the 14C as the name of a demon. By the 16C it had taken on its current meaning.

While never out of use, the term has gained a new twist in the past decade, as a successor in the West Indies and amongst British blacks to the older rude boy: a Jamaican street hustler who was seen, depending on one's perspective, as criminal riffraff, or a streetwise role model. The raggamuffin or ragga (the double-g making a slight reference to reggae music) plays the same role. The generic term queer (the opposite of rum\*) can be found in a number of combinations signifying disapproval: queer bluffer (a 'sneaking, sharping, Cut-throat Ale-house or Inn-keeper' Grose), queer mort ('a dirty Drab, a jilting Wench, a Pockey jade' Grose), queer gill (19C, a shabby fellow), a queer bitch ('an odd out of the way fellow' Grose) and so on.

Of the notable 17C coinages virtually none have survived, for all their undoubted exoticism. A fustilugs (literally 'dirty ears') was described as 'a Fulsom, Beastly, Nasty Woman' in B. E.'s Dictionary of the Canting Crew (1698?); a pilgarlick was an outcast, often apostrophised as 'poor pilgarlick' and as such a general term meaning a pitiful creature. The words comes from SE peel garlic which, on the basis of the smooth garlic clove, meant literally a bald-headed man. Similar terms, all meaning bald, include pilcorn, pilledow and pilpate. A shotten herring or shotten soul came from the Dutch schoten haringh and referred properly to any fish (especially a herring) that has spawned. Such herrings were 'empty' of their spawn and when the term was applied to human beings it meant emaciated, worthless and generally good for nothing. Like shotten herring slubberdegullion or slabberdegullion comes from the Dutch, in which the word overslubberen means to wade through mud and plain slabberen gives slabber, a synonym of SE slobber, to dribble saliva. Thus the term means a filthy, slobbering fellow. Tarleather is a general term of abuse directed at women; its SE meaning is of a strip of leather used in a flail; the women thus described are presumably scolds and, given that leather can mean vagina, the word is a distant precursor of pussy-whipped\*. It must also relate to the 19C bulldoser or bulldozer, which came from the US bulldoze: to whip with a strip of hide, and went on to mean one who is seen as doing that whipping: a domineering woman. Son of a bitch, a 17C coinage which originally meant a

bastard, has survived. With such synonyms as sonofagun, SOB and sumbitch it is still going strong.

The 18C gives plain animal as well as the specific pig, a term that was widely assumed to have sprung fresh-minted into mid-20C life, when it was used by the radical young of the 1960s to mean a policeman, but in fact has a somewhat older pedigree. For its use meaning a policeman c.1800 see POLICE. Thatch-gallows was worthless person, good only for thatching a gallows (which of course had no roof) while a slive-andrew was composed of slive: to sneak away and andrew: a servant and meant a general lazy-bones. Finally a sad man was mischievous, troublesome and dissipated; the term has recently reappeared as part of contemporary teen vocabulary: such figures are less mischievous and dissipated than merely inadequate and it is their unfortunate ineptitude that makes them so pitiable.

#### NINETEENTH CENTURY

Many of the sexually-based terms that form the core of the modern vocabulary of insult emerge during the 19C. These include arsehole\*, bugger\*, cocksucker\* (although at the time this meant merely toady and carried no sexual overtones), cunt\*, sod\* (fr. sodomite; cf. bugger) and fucker\*. Aside from these are other staples: mug (19C, a fool or dupe into whose ear any nonsense might be 'poured'), lummox or lummocks (fr. the dial. verb lummock: to move heavily or clumsily; the 20C lug has the same image of heavy work), sucker (US, originally a parasite, then a dupe or innocent), a bad egg, bad hat, bad penny (fr. the earlier bad halfpenny) all of which lead to the 20C baddy (although this is also linked to bad guy), hard and hard case, sap or sapskull (a simpleton who is 'soft in the head'), lowlife, yob or yobbo (both of which come from the backsl. meaning boy) and hood or hoodlum. The origins of hoodlum, which means unpleasant person in general and thug or gangster in particular and which was coined in San Francisco c.1870-72, are lost. The term spread across the US by the end of the decade, generating a number of popular etymologies. Among them, according to H. L. Mencken,

is the idea of a local newspaperman who, keen to coin a term to describe the street gangs that were plaguing the city's streets, decided simply to reverse the name of a leading gangster, one Muldoon. This created noodlum, and a printer's error, substituting h for n, did the rest. Other theories include a reference to a gang rallying-cry: 'Huddle 'em!', and to roots in the Bavarian dialect term hodalump which carries exactly the same meaning, in various terms in Spanish and among US Indian languages and the wonderfully unlikely linkage put forward by Barrère and Leland (Slang, Jargon and Cant [1889]) that the term is based on the pidgin English hood lahnt: lazy. It is tempting to bring in hooligan, with much the same meaning, but that word was British, and only appeared when it started finding its way into London police reports c.1898.

Two long-running Australian terms: lare and larrikin, also appear in this period. Lare means a loud and flashy person and is a back-formation of lairy, itself a variation on leery, both of which mean cunning, smart and 'fly'. Lare succeeded the earlier cabbage-tree mob (a type of mid-19C layabout, typified by his wearing of a cabbage-tree hat: a hat made of woven cabbage-tree or cabbage-palm leaves) and was in turn replaced by today's larrikin which appeared c.1870 in Melbourne. Larrikin obviously has some connection to lare, but it is also tied to larking, as in larking about, and to the Worcestershire dial. larrikin: a mischievous youth and the Yorkshire term larack: to lark about. The term may also be an abbreviation of leary kinchen: a 'fly' youngster.

Less well-known are such obsolete terms as shagbag (fr. 17C shakebag\*: a whore), gallows, gallows-bird and slip-gibbet, rudesby (SE rude plus the sfx. -by), shicer (either from shice: worthless or German sheisse: shit), scurf (which had referred to a variety of skin diseases since the 11C), scrub (spec. a shabby fellow, or one who doesn't pay his round at a tavern), seek-sorrow (a whining malcontent), slamtrash, slamkin or slammocks (all based on the dial. slam: an ill-shaped person; cf. lummocks), slobberer (spec. a bad farmer) and spalpeen (fr. the Irish word meaning a low or mean fellow, and originally a casual farm labourer). A wrong 'un was originally a horse that had been deliberately pulled up during a race while a torril referred equally

negatively to horseflesh or womankind; sweep is an abbreviation of chimney sweep (although in some contexts – notably weddings – sweeps were seen as good luck rather than as bad people) and a moocher meant one who mooches or hangs around.

Hard-edged as ever, the 20C scatters its insults with abandon. Motherfucker, probably the ultimate in obscenities gives a wide range of synonyms, ostensibly euphemistic but quite transparent: granny-jazzer, mammy-jammer, mammy-rammer, mammy-mammy-tapper, m.f., mollyfock, momma-hopper, mother-fouler, mother-flunker, mother-raper, mother, mother-grabber, mother-hugger, mother-jiver, mother-jumper, triple clutcher and poppa-lopper. No less direct are cunt-lapper, scumsucker (cf. cocksucker), dickhead, dork, prick and putz (all based on terms meaning penis), knucklehead (originally Aus.), douchebag, dumb cluck, dumb fuck and dum-dum, four-letter man (c-u-n-t) and twat\* or twot, fuckwit, ponce\*, shit, shit on a stick (AA), shit-for-brains, shitbird, shithead and shitheel and such characterisations as you piece of crap, you lump of shit, etc.

The animal kingdom is represented by ape and baboon (both tending to violence), peck or peckerwood (see RACE RELA-TIONS), dog (which often means an unattractive woman, but can be used more generally to describe the second-rate or unappealing in many areas; one theory suggests that dog as a prefix implies useless), horse's arse or horse's ass, rat (originally a 17C term meaning a drunken person who has been arrested; cf. rat-arsed\*: drunk), rat arse, rat bastard, rat prick and ratbag (Aus.); a turkey has signified a theatrical or other commercial disaster since the 1940s, its human dimension appeared in 1951; the 19C Turk was also a pejorative, describing Irish immigrants to the US; alley cat or alley rat, the punning pheasant plucker (a play on 'pleasant fucker') and pug or puggy (the first of which refers to a breed of dog, but properly means a fighter). Basket and bar steward both mean bastard, as does the Yiddish momser and the backslang dratsab; Yiddish also gives schmo\*, schlemiel\* and other terms meaning primarily fool (qv) as well as shtarka\* (a tough guy). Black America has beige and butterhead, out and

out (cf. out-and-outer\*) and poopbutt (fr. poop: arse and butt: arse). A ball-buster, ball-tearer or ball-breaker is a nag, a chippy-chaser pursues prostitutes (cf. chippy\*), a naus is rhy. sl. noah's, from noah's ark: nark: informer.

**Nellie**, with its implications of effeminacy, is ostensibly an abbrev. of the name Eleanor, but may also come from the rhy. sl. nellie duff: puff\*: homosexual; but the term is originally US and the rhy. sl. is a UK coinage. Nerd, possibly a euphemism for the equally insulting turd, is certainly an American coinage, albeit a mysterious one. The OED suggests a rhyme in 'If I Ran a Zoo' (1950) by the children's author Dr. Seuss (Theodore Seuss Geisel, [1904-]) in which he writes, 'And then, just to show them, / I'll sail to Ka-Troo / And Bring Back an It-Kutch, a Preep and a Proo, / a Nerkle, a Nerd, and a Seersucker, too!'. Cloth-ears (fr. a hat which has ear-flaps, blocking sound as well as the cold), face-ache, pudding head and heel (fr. shitheel) all represent the body; an oik began life in Britain's public schools c.1925. The term is linked to hoick and oick, both meaning spit; it is also an abbrev. of oickman: a labourer or shopkeeper and may also refer to the 'common' habit of shouting 'Oi!' to attract someone's attention. Crud (fr. crut: excrement) means anything or anyone distasteful, a dub is complete failure while the rhy. sl. J. Arthur means wanker\* (see MASTURBATION), itself a term of abuse as well as a masturbator. A kiss of death (fr. the kiss Judas Iscariot gave Christ) is a person to be avoided, slag\* dates from the 18C, when it meant a coward, but by the 20C meant a generally unacceptable person, a smartiepants is a knowall\*, a so-and-so a euphemism for sonofabitch and a weathercock vacillates. Freak (fr. 19C SE: a monstrosity) echoed its SE meaning, but had a brief period, c. 1970, of use by the hippies as a term of self-celebration and a deliberate challenge to the conventional, world. Finally raas or raasclat ('arse cloth') are West Indian terms meaning menstrual towel.

## **THUGS**

The terms listed above are on the whole general insults; this group adds violence to unpleasantness and gives the thug.

The barker, more usually defined as a fairground tout, appears in 1483; perhaps he 'barks' his threats; the following century gives Captain Hackum, a rush buckler (fr rush: to force violently and buckler: shield; cf. swashbuckler) and tearer, tearcat and Timothy Tearcat (fr. tearcat, a possible euphemism for tear arse: one who runs about excitedly). The 17C bouncer went on to become the 20C's nightclub or dancehall doorman; a twibill is based on the SE twibill: a two-edged axe, while an oatmeal is one whose rowdiness must be attributed to his 'sowing his wild oats'. A roarer, a roaring boy or roaring girl all come from roar: to riot, and are best seen in the title of the Middleton & Dekker play: The Roaring Girle based on the life of Moll Cut-purse (1611); moll\* and cut-purse\* are, of course, cant terms in themselves. Perhaps the strangest 17C term is tittery-tu which comes from the first words of Virgil's first ecloque, 'Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi' and which referred to a gang of well-to-do roughs who infested the London streets. The Latin tag implied that these privileged rogues were men of leisure and fortune, who 'lay at ease under their patrimonial beech trees'. Such wealthy scoundrels predated such gangs as the 18C Mohawks and the less highly-born but even more pugnacious Dead Rabbits and Plug Uglies, who assailed the law-abiding citizens of New York a century later. Another brand of street thug was the scourer or scowrer, whose enjoyments included terrorising passing citizens, beating up night watchmen, smashing windows and similar pursuits.

This period also introduces tory, now the shorthand for Britain's Conservative party. The original use, while still political, was somewhat fifferent. It comes from the anglicized spelling of the Irish tóraidhe: pursuer, although some sources define a tory as the one pursued, and therefore an outlaw. The term was used to describe those of the dispossessed Irish who in the 17C became outlaws, subsisting by plundering and killing the English settlers and soldiers. In time tory meant any form of outlaw, including Rajput marauders and Highland rebels. Tory with a capital T enters the language c.1679 when it was the nickname given to those who opposed the exclusion of James, Duke of York (a Roman Catholic) from the succession to the British Crown. According to Roger

North writing in Examen (1740), The Bill of Exclusion 'led to a common Use of slighting and opprobrious Words; such as Yorkist. That did not scandalise or reflect enough. Then they came to Tantivy, which implied Riding Post to Rome... Then, observing that the Duke favoured Irish Men, all his Friends, or those accounted such by appearing against the Exclusion, were straight become Irish, and so wild Irish, thence Bogtrotters, and in the Copia of the factious Language, the Word Tory was entertained, which signified the most despicable Savages among the Wild Irish.' The 18C brings the sockie, sockhead and socker (fr. sock: to hit hard), and the yahoo, a philistine, lout or hooligan, invented by Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels (1726), who described them thus: 'The Fore-feet of the Yahoo differed from my Hands in nothing else, but the Length of the Nails, the Coarseness and Brownness of the Palms, and the Hairiness on the Backs.'

Thugs of the next century include the basher, the slasher, the ramper (fr. ramp: robbery with violence), the rough, the rowdy, the bruiser (which like basher originally meant a prize-fighter), the hood or hoodlum (see above), the sawney and sonky (also meaning a clumsy person; cf. lummox, lug) and ugly customer\*. Bloodtub also referred to the lowest form of 'blood and thunder' entertainment the Victorian theatre could offer while a boy of the Holy Ground was a member of a gang who lived near the St Giles rookery (18C: a slum, largely populated by criminals; the site of this notorious area, once visited by Dickens with a police escort, is now that of London's Centre Point high rise), otherwise known as the Holy Land. The ragster came from 19C rag: tongue and its verb form to rag: to tease; bucko was originally nautical slang and is usually found in the combination bucko mate: a tough and violent ship's officer; bucko itself comes from the 18C buck: a roisterer or blood. Hector was based on the Trojan hero, thus hectoring: aggressive verbal bullying; jibone or jabone originally described newly arrived Italian immigrants to the US.

The language of those same immigrants gives one of the most celebrated terms in 20C criminal slang: **goombah**, translated as godfather and as such a Mafia chieftain; the term is the anglicized pronunciation of the Italian *compare*: a companion or specifically a

godfather. Another widely recognised term is goon, which originally meant labour enforcer, but expanded to mean any thug. The word may come from a cartoon character, Alice the Goon from the comic *Thimble Theatre* (1919) by E. C. Segar (1894-1938); given the miminal intelligence of such men, it may also come from from gooney: a fool, which in turn stems from the Old English ganian: to gape. The remaining 20C terms require no etymology, they declare themselves unequivocally: ass-kicker, gorilla, hatchet man, heavy, husky, muscle, punch-out artist, SAN (stop-at-nothing) man, tough guy or tough nut and torpedo.

# **SWEARING AND OATHS**

The vocabulary of swearing, foul language, oaths or profanity falls into two basic categories: the religious and the physical. The former, while still in common use, has lost much of the resonance that it held in an age when spirituality carried greater weight, the latter remains capable of shock, albeit much diminished today. This vocabulary can therefore be divided into a number of sections: God, Jesus and Christ, Lord, the Devil and Hell, Heaven, Damn and Damned, Bodily Functions, Fuck, Bloody, and a variety of Miscellaneous areas, a list based on that suggested by Professor Geoffrey Hughes' Swearing (1992), in which he analyses the sociology as well as the terminology of oaths in far greater detail that is possible here.

# GOD

Unlike Judaism, where the tetragrammaton JHVH, the unspeakable name of God, is a primary taboo, and is usually replaced by such constructs as adonai (the Lord), it is no way incumbent upon Christianity to avoid speaking the word 'God'. Nonetheless euphemisms for the Deity abound, especially as generated by swearing, and may be seen as among the very earliest of slang terminology. Thus the 14C has gog, cock and its variation cokk; cock appears

in Chaucer (1386), but perhaps its optimum appearance is in Shakespeare's punning euphemism: 'Young men will do't, if they come to't, By cock, they are to blame' (Hamlet IV v. [1602]) in which the Deity and the penis are briefly united. God and the genitalia meet again (albeit quite coincidentally) in the 16C cod; the 16C also has gar and Jove (the Latinised form of the Greek Zeus). The century also introduces a number of elisions, notably 'sblood, 'slid, 'slight and 'snails meaning respectively God's blood, God's eyelid, God's light and God's nails. Elision continues into the 17C, where one finds zounds and godsookers (God's wounds), 'sbody (God's body) and gods bodykins (God's little body, from the diminutive suffix -kin), 'sfoot (God's foot) and gadzooks (God's hooks; the relevance of hook is debatable: Partridge suggests hocks or houghs: bones; hook or huck, meaning hip-bones is also a candidate; in either case it must thus mean simply God's bones). Other contemporary coinages include od, odso, dod, adad, adod, gad, odsbobs (cf. odsbodikins) and egad.

Ounds (cf. zounds) and odsbodikins (God's little body, cf. Gods bodikins) appear during the 18C, as do agad, gosh (giving the later combinations gosh-almighty and gosh-darn!), ecod, goles, golly (an AA creation), odrabbit it and odd rat it (God rot it; cf. drat), gracious, gosse and bedad (Irish), begad, begar and egad, all of which mean by God! The 19C errs to paganism with ye gods and its peer ye gods and little fishes, and uses a variety of proper names as substitutes for God's own: by George, Great Scott, great Caesar's ghost (and great snakes, possibly great Satan?) and Bob, as in s'elpe me (so help me) Bob. The American West produces doggone which is generally assumed to be a deformation of the profane God damn (cf. dang, darn, goldarn, etc.); some, however, think the original phrase was quite literally dog on it, a similar construction to the secular pox on it! Goddam (coined in the 15C) became so prevalent an oath that the French began calling Britons les goddams (the 20C equivalent is les fuckoffs). Variations include consarned, goldarn, goshdamned, gosh-danged, gosh-dern, God-blasted, dad-blasted, dad-gasted, dad-gummed, dad-binged, dad-snatched, dadrotted, dad-goned and dad-fetched.

Britain's North has gom and gum, typically in the oath by gum!, a staple of 'Lancashire' characters; gum is either a simple play on God, or possibly an abbreviation of God almighty. Other euphemisms for by God! included by golly!, by gosh!, by gorry!, by jimminy!, by jove! and by the great horn spoon! (US). By jingo was another variation, and one that carried more etymological baggage than most. It appears first c.1670 as a piece of conjuror's gibberish, usually as hey or high jingo! and is pronounced when the trick required something to appear (it is thus the opposite of hey presto! uttered when an object disappears), and again in Motteux's translation of Rabelais (1694) where it is a translation of the French par Dieu thus underlining its position among the euphemisms. Jings has a lengthy pedigree in Scotland, while some sources equate jingo with the Basque Jinko or Jainko: God. The expression by Jingo! gained its widest publicity from the music-hall song of 1878, celebrating Britain's involvement in the 'Russo-Turkish War whence Lord Beaconsfield despatched a British fleet to help the Turks, engendering G. W. Hunt's lyric: 'We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do / We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too...'Jingo or jingoist soon came to mean a blustering hyper-patriot, the homegrown equivalent of the French chauvinist.

Drat and od rot it extend the 18C's odd rat it. The 20C has good grief and by Godfrey and cor (God), best seen in the phrase cor blimey or gorblimey: God blind me! A 'gorblimey' was the common term for a floppy, field-service cap worn by a certain type of subaltern in defiance of Regulations during World War I. A popular song ran 'He wears gorblimey trousers And a little gorblimey 'at.' Gorblimey trousers reappeared in Fifties' hit: 'My Old Man's A Dustman'. Another elision, 'strewth (19C), meant God's truth, while Gordon Bennett! referred either to James Gordon Bennet (1795–1892) the founding editor of the New York Herald or to his similarly named son.

# JESUS AND CHRIST

Swearing oaths by Christ's name, whether Jesus or Christ itself, is a venerable institution. Nearly all such terms are euphemistic, doing

no more than lightly disguise Christ's names. Gis and Jis are both 16C, Gemini is 17C and Jiminy, Jiminy Crickets, gee whillikins, gee whillikers, and gee whiz all 19C. The 20C adds Jeez, gee, Jeepers, Jesus wept, sweet Jesus or sweet bleeding Jesus, Judas Priest, Jesus H. Christ and Jeepers Creepers. Plain Jesus! is of course equally common. Bejazus! means by Jesus (it can also appear as a noun, e.g. kick the bejazus out of), while begorra! and bejabers! those other staples of the world's stage Irishmen mean by God. Jumping Jehosaphat! or plain Jehosaphat comes from Jehosaphat, King of Judah c.873-849BC. Terms for Christ include the 17C criminy (presumably from Christ, but possibly from the Latin crimen meum: my fault) and the 19C crickey, crikey, cripes and Christmas. The 20C exclamation for crying out loud is a further euphemism. Like Jesus! Christ! itself is common, as are such phrases as Christ Almighty!, Christ on a crutch!, Christopher Columbus!, cracky! and the dated and schoolboyish crumbs!. While the Mariolatry of many Roman Catholic countries means that Mary plays a central role in their profane lexicons, Christ's mother has hardly a look-in in Protestant Britain and America. Thus the single word Mary! is virtually all one finds, although Irish immigrants offer Holy Mary Mother of God and similar phraseology.

# HEAVEN AND HELL

Lord is synonymous, given the context, with either God or Jesus, but is productive of far fewer terms. Such as do exist include lud and lawks (18C), lor!, law sakes!, landsakes (US), lor-a-mussy! or lawks-a-mussy (or mercy), lawdy! and lumme (Lord love me!), all of which emerged during the 19C and tend, in fiction at least, to end up in the mouths of female members of the servants' hall. Thus too the 20C Lord love a duck!, Lord love us! or Lord love you! and a number of terms based on bless me!: typically bless my heart! and bless my soul! (all of which refer in turn to the 17C phrase to bless oneself: meaning ironically to swear). Mercy! and Glory! (plus Glory be!) are both the mildest of expletives, while neither holy cats!, nor holy cow!, holy cripes!,

holy mackerel!, holy Moses! nor holy smoke! are any of them likely to raise even the most puritan eyebrow. Heavens to Betsy! and heavens to Murgatroyd are equally anodyne.

Slang terms for the devil are many and various; among them are old hornie, little quid, old Bendy, old Blazes, old driver, old Harry, old gooseberry, the old one, old splitfoot, old roger, old toast, old ruffian and old toot (thus on a toot: on a spree). That said only deuce (17C, plus 18C deuced), and deuced (often spelt dooce to indicate a splenetic, high Tory speaker) can be cited as specific oaths, although a number of terms are found with reference to his kingdom: hell. Hell! itself is very popular, as are the euphemisms Sam Hill and heck (18C, both often found prefixed by 'what the...'), Other hell-bound terms include hellfired (18C), hell's bells!, the hell with it!, to hell with it! and what the hell!. To hell with you, go to hell and go to blazes remain popular curses, although go to Hong Kong, go to Jerusalem, go to Putney on a pig (19C), go to hell and help your mother make bitch-pie (18C), and go to hell, Hull and Halifax (17C) have all vanished. The latter, also found in the prayer 'from hell, Hull and Halifax, Good Lord deliver us', refers to the Halifax Gibbet Law, under which a prisoner was executed first and his guilt or innocence ascertained afterwards.

### DAMN AND DAMNED

Those consigned to hell are, in the eyes of believers, damned, and the use of damn as an oath began as an unalloyed religious term. Based on the Latin damnare or dampnare: to inflict damage or loss upon, it came to mean to condemn, or to doom to punishment and was used as such both in law and in the theological sense, in which case one's condemnation was to the infernal regions. By the 17C the theological aspects, while still at the heart of the term, had softened somewhat, an easing that may be seen in the alternative spellings demn and dem. Thus Dickens uses demnition (fr. 18C damnation) in Nicholas Nickleby (1838) and across the Atlantic the bowdlerization proceded even further with the introduction of darn and dern and dang. Even milder are blowed and blow it!,

dashed, dash!, dash it! or dash it all!, all witnesses to the increasing use by editors of dashes to indicate unacceptable language; both the practice and the terminology continue with blankety and blank (19C), each of which indicates white space. Less reticent are damnit! or dammit!, dammit to hell (and back), damn my stars and damn my sakes. Tarnation (fr. damnation) is late 18C US, based in part on tarnal, an abbreviation of SE eternal and used as such in a swearing context.

#### **FUCK**

Given its position as the most extreme of obscenities it is hardly surprising that fuck (see SEXUAL INTERCOURSE for etymology) has featured for several centuries amongst the vocabulary of cursing. The 16C foutre and foutra (fr. the equally obscene French foutre) are followed by the 17C foot and sfoot (both from foutre again) and the 18C footer, footy, frig and frigging (which has a parellel meaning of masturbation). Fucking itself does not appear until c.1840. The 19C also retreats into euphemism with fizzing (a synonym for fuck but also used to mean excellent or first rate, and as such referring not to sex but to effervescence). The 20C offers effing, effing and blinding, eff (especially as in the injunction eff off!) and the euphemistic flipping, freaking and fudge. Fuck-related phrases include fuck a duck!, fuck this for a lark!, fuck this for a game of soldiers! and chuck you, Farley! (a reverse of fuck you charlie and a variation on the popular fuck you Jack, I'm all right, predictably censored for the title of the film I'm All Right Jack [1959]).

Fuck gains an extra, and for most people an even less acceptable dimension when it appears in what has been termed the 'Oedipal polysyllable': motherfucker. While motherfucker, often abbreviated to mother may go unremarked in certain circles, and amongst US blacks even exist as a term of affection, or as a neutral noun meaning nothing more particular than 'thing', it remains for the most part the most obscene of all obscenities. Unsurprisingly motherfucker and its adjectival form motherfucking have been surrounded with a wide range of euphemisms. Among them are

mammy-jamming, mammy-ramming, mammy-tapping, molly-focking, mother-flunking, motherfouling, mothergrabbing, motherhugging, mother-jiving, mother-jumping, motherless, motherloving and mother-raping.

#### **BLOODY**

The impact of the so-called obscenities varies as to context and none more so than bloody, which is barely acceptable in the UK, the essence (albeit embarrassingly so) of the national vocabulary in Australia, and of virtually no importance whatsoever in America. Its use is universal: as an intensifier, meaning very, exceedingly; abominably or desperately. As the OED put it in 1887, 'In general colloquial use from the Restoration to c.1750; now constantly in the mouths of the lowest classes, but by respectable people considered 'a horrid word', on a par with obscene or profane language, and usually printed in the newspapers [as] b----y.' The latter proscription has largely vanished - when bloody does crop up in the press it tends to be in direct, quoted speech and is printed in full -but the term, in the UK at least, has yet to enter 'polite' society. As to its etymology, the OED links it to the preoccupations of the 'bloods' or aristocratic rowdies of the end of the 17C and beginning of the 18C. Thus the phrase 'bloody drunk' meant 'as drunk as a blood'. Its associations with bloodshed and murder (typically a bloody battle) 'have recommended it to the rough classes as a word that appeals to their imagination' and the Dictionary goes on to compare its late-19C popularity with other 'impressive or graphic intensives, seen in the use of jolly, awfully, terribly, devilish, deuced, damned, ripping, rattling, thumping, stunning, thundering, etc.' As far as origins are concerned, it has no links to theology, nor to the term 'sblood (God's blood); in addition, declare Farmer and Henley in their definition, 'In passing it may be mentioned that there is no ground for attributing its derivation to "By'r Our Lady" Indeed all such fancies are studiously dismissed by the experts; Eric Partridge rounds off any speculation, saying that 'There is no need for ingenious etymologies: the idea of blood suffices'. Euphemisms and synonyms for bloody include blooming (19C), bally (19C), blasted (18C), bleeding (19C) and blinking (19C).

Thus bloody continues to exist on the margins (in the UK at least) of language that is acceptable if distasteful and that which is downright taboo. It is in Australia, however, that it has pride of place. Frances Grose wrote in 1796 of how popular bloody was amongst the contemporary London underworld; there is no doubt that, along with the transported felons of the period, it made its way to the penal colonies of Botany Bay. Fifty years later it was well-established: writing in his book Travels in New South Wales (1847) Alexander Marjoribanks noted the prevalence of the word, claiming that he had heard a bullock driver use it twenty-seven times in fifteen minutes; a rate of speech, he then calculated, that over a fifty year period would produce some 18,200,000 repetitions of the 'disgusting word'. The Sydney Bulletin called it 'the Australian adjective' in its edition of August 18, 1894, explaining that 'it is more used, and used more exclusively by Australians, than by any other allegedly civilized nation'. The term gained its final sanctification as the 'Great Australian Adjective' when W.T. Goodge used the phrase as the title for one of the poems he included in his Hits! Skits! and Jingles! (1899).

# **BODILY FUNCTIONS**

As well as the pure sexuality that underlines the uses of fuck, other bodily functions are productive of swear-words. Shit (see DEFECA-TION for etymology) either exists in its own right or in such euphemisms as shucks (19C), shoot, sheet, sugar and sherbert (all 20C). Shit and derision remains a common exclamation. Shitten and shitting both go back to the 16C, while stinking (whether or not it refers directly to excrement) was coined in the 13C, although like so much of latterday slang, it remained SE for the next six centuries. Generally acknowledged as less palatable are cocksucking and corksacking, pissing and cunting (all 20C). Balls! meant exclusively testicles until the late 19C, at which point it began meaning nonsense, and became a dismissive exclamation. Barf! and barf me out! (both from barf: to vomit) come from

California's teenagers; nerts and nuts (cf. balls) are earlier examples of Americana. Bugger!, bugger me! and the adjective buggering all emerge in this context during the 19C. Hughes describes bugger as 'the most flexible of all obscenities', serving equally well in each of the eight categories he specifies as the areas in which such terms work, ranging from the personal ('You ----!'), to cursing ('---- you!') to verbal usage ('To ---- about'). Even fuck, which seems to work in so many different ways, and in so many combinations, is not so prolific.

#### **MISCELLANY**

A number of animals have been enlisted into swearing; they include: suffering cats!, pigs! and pigshit!, rats! and the adjectival usage, cowing. Radishes! is a lone vegetable. More terms meaning cursed include plaguey and botheration! (18C), all-fire(d), blame(d) (US), blithering (fr. blether\*) cussed, sodding, and shucks (meaning valueless, useless, and coming from 17C SE shuck: a husk). Hogan's ghost! is Australian and comes from the Holy Ghost. Your mother! is US and is derived from the ritual insults of the Afro-American 'game': the dozens, in which the parties trade insults; the aim is to break the composure of one's rival while keeping one's own temper. The phrase also gives yomo, meaning a black person.

Swearing produces a number of phrases, some of which have been listed above. Other prominent examples include ferchrissakes!, for Christ's sake!, for crap's sake, for cripes' sake, for crying out loud!, for a mother-fucker! (AA), for gosh sake!, for God's sake!, for heaven's sake!, for landsakes!, for the love of Mike!, for the love of Pete!, my (holy) aunt!, my sainted aunt, my cripes!, my eyes!, my gosh!, my hat! (an abbrev. of I'll eat my hat), my stars (17C) and my stars and garters (19C). More terms are based on the promise 'I'll be...': I'll be a Chinaman!, I'll be a Dutchman!, I'll be a dirty word!, I'll be a monkey's uncle!, I'll be a (lowdown) son of a bitch!, I'll be jiggered, I'll be blowed, I'll be consarned!, I'll be darned!, I'll be jiggered, I'll be hanged, I'll be shot and many

more. Finally two exclamations of surprise are what the fuck! and what the shit!. Such phrases are more or less (but not invariably) euphemistic, as are fiddlesticks (17C), fiddledeedee (18C) and thunderation (19C).

# FOOD

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

In his supposed 'conversation' between a pair of 16C rogues, Thomas Harman has one of them demand, 'Maund of this morte whate bene peck is in her ken', and translates it, 'Ask of this wyfe what goode meate shee hath in her house.' Peck, meaning meat in general, but more usually food, is perhaps the earliest slang, or more precisely, cant term for eatables. Based in the pecking of birds, it gives such combinations as peck alley, the throat and rum peck, good food as well as those at meat, below. Pecker, meaning appetite (as well as penis) is based on peck, while to be off one's peck or to take a holiday at Peckham is to have nothing to eat. If peck has an image of a beak snapping at crumbs, then prog (17C) takes its meaning from its verb form, meaning to poke about for food or to scavenge. Its cant meaning is both that of food, and of any supplies that have been secreted away for later use.

The 17C also has belly timber, with its alternatives belly chere or cheer and belly furniture. Working as a fiddler, in slang at least, gradually attracted greater rewards: fiddler's wages (16C) meant nothing but thanks, fiddler's pay (17C) meant wine and thanks, while fiddler's fare (18C) meant meat drink and money. Grub (17C) is reminiscent of prog in its image of 'grubbing around'; it is also found meaning to eat, to beg for food and to provide with food. The 19C grub stake (US) means sufficient money with which to eat, while the 20C grub up! is a summons to the table. The 19C grubbery or grubbing-ken is an eating house. Scran (18C), with its rhyming slang synonym Tommy O'Rann, originally meant the reckoning at an inn or tavern; by 1785 it meant

food. Yam (18C) is presumably a version of the onomatopoeic yum-yum and is the basis of the nautical phrase get toco for yam: to be punished, in which toco equals a severe blow and 'for' means 'instead of'.

The remaining slang terms for food are of a wide variety. Chop (c.1860) comes from W. Africa where colonists and Africans alike used it to describe indigenous food; it was further suggested that originally chop had meant but one dish: long pig, or human flesh. Chow (and its derivative chuff) (c.1870), came from Chinese pidgin, meaning a mixture; thus the popular dish chow mein (created in America by Chinese cooks pandering to a Western version of real Chinese food) meant literally mixed food, although once again it had an earlier root: chopped morsels, notably those of dogs, rats and similar exotica. A third import was scoff (19C, and possibly choff) which came from South Africa, where it was a Cape Dutch (and originally European Dutch) term meaning a quarter of a day, and thus one of the four meals eaten in a the day; scoff in turn came from schaffen (both Dutch and German), meaning to provide or procure (food). South Africa also provided a Kaffir's tightener (19C, a filling meal). Like peck chuck (19C) embraces all sorts of food, especially meat; it can also mean scraps of meat and when it has been used specifically it has meant a type of steak, a measure of sprats, or, to the Royal Navy, a biscuit.

Munga, mungy, munger or mungarly (19C) all come from Parlyaree, which in turn draws on the French manger and Italian mangiare, both meaning to eat. Combinations include mungy-wallah (19C) used in the services for a man who works in the cookhouse, and mungarly-casa (19C), a baker's shop. Manablins or manavilins, which have the air of being much older, are 19C terms, both meaning broken meat, and thus means bits and pieces (cf. chow) as does hash (more properly 'a mess'). The term was thus adapted by the Navy, where the verb manarvel meant to pilfer small stores; in the wider world it was also used for small change. Stodge (19C) meant food, but especially 'stiff, farinaceaous food'. Slush (19C) began life in the Navy, where it described the refuse fat from boiled meat, the selling of which was a perk accorded the slushy or ship's cook. The term was adopted by tramps to describe

the tea or coffee available in lodging-houses. A slush-bucket is an ill-mannered eater. The fatty mode continues with gorge grease (19C, fr. gorge: the throat, a heavy meal or a glutton).

Tuck (1844) has the secondary meaning of a hearty meal, but tucker (19C Aus.) began life as rations and now means simply food. Tack was originally another naval term: hardtack meant ship's biscuits, soft tack meant bread; both terms were allied to, but predate SE tackle: food. Links to a ship's tackle are feasible, but those to tack—to change direction—seem rather desperate. Feed (early 19C), fodder, fuel and eats (all 20C) are brusquely to the point; the singular eat meant a meal in 11C. Nosh (20C) comes from the Yiddish or German naschen, to eat secretly or to nibble at; thus nosher: one who eats between meals. Fixings means food (though usually the ingredients of a given dish, and in the singular, in Aus., means strong drink); groceries (19C) is found in Anglo-Irish dialect as 'a decanter of whiskey and a bowl of sugar'.

Bad food is variously crap, a dog's dinner, dog vomit, garbage, glop, gunge, slop or slops, shit or vom (fr. vomit); a burnt offering is anything burnt, while junk food is fast food.

# BREAD

As well as the rhyming slang needle and thread (19C) and Uncle Fred (20C), bread has generated a number of slang terms. Harman (16C) gives pannam which comes directly from the Latin panis, meaning bread.

Tommy (18C) has a debatable etymology. The OED suggests that it is an abbreviation of the British soldier's nickname for his ration of brown bread, generally known as brown tommy or Tommy Brown and hence, with time, as plain tommy. A similar name, brown George, had been used for the bread ration in the 17C. Brown tommy was the opposite of soft tommy, or soft white bread. An alternative source, however, may be in the tradition in Bedford of making a free distribution of bread to the poor on each St Thomas' Day (December 21, commemorating the apostle who refused to believe in the Resurrection, and was subsequently patron saint of architects and the blind). Other terms for bread

include **rooti** (19C), used by the British Army who borrowed it from the Hindi *roti*, a flat, unleavened bread. A **dead 'un** (19C) was a half-quartern loaf, while a **vantage loaf** (19C) was the 13th loaf in a baker's dozen; **vantage** in this context means advantage, and therefore extra. A sandwich, supposedly invented c. 1765, is variously a **thumber** (19C), a **butty**, a **sango** (Australia) or a **sarnie**.

#### **MEAT**

Many general terms for meat come from the old, but not wholly obsolete British butcher's backslang. Typical are **beemal** (lamb), **feeb** (beef), **kayrop** (pork) and **delok** (any cold meat); frozen meat is also simply **cold**. Town (i.e abbatoir rather than farm or home killed) meat is **teekay** or **TK**, home killed is **HK**. **Elwoff** (while not strictly meat) means poultry.

Earlier terms include grunter and grunting-peck (16C, pork; cf. grunting chete\*) and ruff-peck (16C, bacon, perhaps literally 'rough food'). Piano (20C, AA) is spare ribs, while salt pork (US, 19C) was galena (fr. Galena, Ill. a centre of the pork rearing and packing industry), not to be confused galeny\*, the 16C term for fowl. God's mercy (19C) meant ham or bacon and eggs, from the grace one might say before eating it; regular visitors called it 365, from its being available on a menu every day of the year. Such numerology predates the number codes central to the jargon of modern US cafes and diners.

To return to meat, salt pork, especially when served at sea, was junk, a term that originally described pieces of rope and which was usually qualified as old, salt or tough junk. Salt beef was old horse or salt horse. In Australia Harriet Lane meant tinned meat; the meat in question was chopped up, and a hapless murder victim, Harriet Lane had been chopped up c. 1875 by one Wainwright. Another brutal killing, this time of eight year-old Fanny Adams, at Alton in Hampshire on August 24, 1867, gives Fanny Adams: tinned mutton. This murderer, one Frederick Baker, was hanged at Winchester on Christmas Eve; 5,000 people watched the execution. The mouse (19C) is a small piece of meat immediately. above the knee joint; a staggering bob is meat unfit to eat, a term

taken from the meat trade jargon: bob or bobby, especially when describing animals that have died rather than been slaughtered.

The 19C offers a number of terms for specific dishes. The sergeant major is a fat loin of mutton, the origin being in the assumed plumpness of pampered sergeant majors and the streaks of fat that, loosely, resemble his stripes. Snob's duck is a leg of mutton stuffed with sage and onions; the snob in this context is a cobbler, a usage that precedes the social one. A wabbler or wobbler is a boiled leg of mutton, while a steak is a four-wheeler. A Field-Lane duck is a baked sheep's head: Field Lane once linked Holborn to Clerkenwell. Irish turkey is corned beef and cabbage.

Shit on a shingle or twice laid both mean minced meat on toast in the US; the rhyming slang kate and sidney means steak and kidney, while surf and turf, popular in the 1970s and beyond, means a meal composed of lobster and steak. Terms for stew include the tramp's Mulligan stew (an assembly of any available foods); bonnets so blue (rhyming slang for Irish stew) and lobscouse (18C) a sailor's dish consisting of meat stewed with vegetables and ship's biscuit; the totemic dish of Liverpool, and, as scouse or scousers, the collective name of the city's population. Lob, meaning bubbling or boiling, is also found in the 16C loblolly, a thick gruel, found both as a peasant or nautical dish or as a as a simple medicine; as such it also meant the medicines carried by a ship's doctor. Gravy gives the rhyming slang army and navy.

Other stews include daddy funk, dead horse, dogsbody (19C, specifically pease pudding), dough Jehovahs, measles (more usually found as syphilis, qv), sea pie and meat-fosh (19C, fosh possibly based on the French fara). Lilian Baylis' leg is the stew served to actors in the canteen of the National Theatre; named for Lilian Baylis, C.H. (1874–1937), theatrical manager and founder of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells theatres.

Sausages are bangers (20C, thus bangers and red lead: tinned sausages and tomato sauce), skintights, spotted dogs or mysteries, snorkers, snags and swags (the last three all mainly Australian); red-hots (US) are frankfurters with chili and girl and boy is rhyming slang for saveloy); dogs, bags of mystery (19C), chambers of horrors (19C), gut pudding, sore leg (which can

also mean plum pudding) and **Sharp's Alley blood worms** (19C, Sharp's Alley was an abbatoir near the great Smithfield meat market in London) all show an instinctive distrust of the ingredients.

#### **FISH**

While a kipper is the rhyming Jack the Ripper, a Cornish duck a pilchard, anchovies on toast a whale and oysters Miltons, the bulk of fish slang relates to herrings, for many years far and away the most widely eaten fish in the UK.

Such terms, often prefixed by a local name, include the two-eyed steak (also a bloater), searover, the gendarme, the magistrate, the Glasgow magistrate or Glasgow baillie, the Atlantic ranger, the Gourock ham (Gourock is a Clyde fishing village; such 'hams' were salted) or the Digby chicken (Digby is in Nova Scotia; these herrings are usually smoked and occasionally found as Digby ducks). A soldier means both herring and boiled lobster; lobster, in turn, has meant soldier, notably from the red uniforms worn by British soldiers during the American War of Independence. The red herring was a red, a Dunbar wether, a Californian, a pheasant or Billingsgate pheasant, a Taunton turkey or Yarmouth capon. A Crail capon was a dried, unsplit haddock; Crail is a fishing port in Fife.

#### **VEGETABLES**

Vegetables are veggies or, if salad, rabbit food; a specific prison use gives the rhyming slang has-beens: greens. Somewhat in advance of the brand-name for instant mashed potatoes smash (18C) meant mashed turnips. Cabbage is Joe Savage and poor man's treacle is garlic (17C) or onions (19C), garden violets are onions, especially the spring onions used in salads. The potato, as a staple, is slang's most popular vegetable. Many of the references, unsurprisingly, are 'Irish', and come mainly from the 19C: murphs or murphies, praties, Irish apricots or lemons, bog-oranges, donovans and Munster plums. Other terms include ruggins, ronnys (fr. the dialect rouny or roundy: a round object), spuds (possibly from the similarly named digging instrument), tunnel-

grunters, taturs and navigators or navs; a steam-engine was a potato-pie while on some US campuses bimps are french fries.

#### DAIRY PRODUCTS

The earliest terms for cheese are cassan (cited in Harman, 1567), cass and caz (all of which come from the Romany cas; cf SE casein: the milk ingredient that is basis of cheese). Other terms include choke dog, sweaty-toe, the rhy. sl. bended knees and stand at ease. In US cafes, ace is a grilled cheese sandwich. Harman has param or yarum (possibly a corruption of yellow or yallow) for milk, while lap is buttermilk or whey. Butter is ointment, grease, cart grease or the rhyming stammer and stutter and roll-me-in-the-gutter. Margarine is marj.

Terms for egg dishes come primarily from the vocabulary of US short-order chefs. Thus Adam and Eve is two eggs, Adam and Eve on a raft (two eggs on toast), Adam and Eve on a raft and wreck 'em (scrambled eggs on toast); two looking at you (two fried eggs), sunny side up (eggs fried on one side only), two down, two with their eyes closed or over easy (eggs turned over) and two on a slice of squeal (two eggs on fried ham).

#### OTHER FOODS

Cake offers the rhyming slang Joe Blake (which can also mean steak or indeed a snake, while the Joe Blakes\* are the shakes, i.e. delirium tremens and Joe Blake the Barthelmy [19C] meant to visit a prostitute) or Sexton Blake (the fictitious detective created in 1893 by Hal Meredith, the pseudonym of Harry Blyth). A sinker (US) is a doughnut while 19C Britain had the rector and curate, respectively the bottom and top halves of a teacake or muffin—the rector, the senior figure, was given more butter; the terms were also used for the everyday poker and its fancy variety, brought out, presumably, for 'company'.

Breakfast cereals are **soggies** or the older **burgoo** (18C, an oatmeal porridge; the word is based on the Turkish *burghul* cracked wheat); sugar is **sand**. Pizza is **za** while spaghetti bolognese is **spag bol**. Soup can be **loop-the-loop** (rhyming slang), **glue**, **rib** 

tickler or stick in the ribs (all 19C thick soups), hishee hashee, soap and bullion (fr. the French bouillon).

A watermelon (a supposed staple of the black community) is an African golf ball or a culture fruit (fr. cultural: pertaining to black culture); rape is backsl. for a pear. A plum or currant dumpling was a spotted dog, plum pudding was a spotted donkey or leopard and a suet pudding with currants or raisins is still spotted dick; pudding in general was steaming (19C). A snack or a drink before breakfast (as used in the countryside) was a dew bit or dew drink (both 19C); mayonnaise is mayo and pickles Harvey Nichols (rhy. sl.); ice cream is scream, chilli red, prison tea diesel, an Indian meal an Indian and a Chinese one a Chinese.

# DRINKING AND DRINKS

More even than sex, unless one lumps together the acts and the organs, drink and drinking, and particularly drunkenness, dominates the slang lexicon. One expert has amassed nearly 2,500 terms. Killing the pain of life has been a basic preoccupation for millenia; slang gleaned from the last four hundred years makes it obvious that very little has changed, or is indeed likely to do so.

# TO DRINK

It is perhaps some testimony to human appetites for alcohol that among the earliest terms for drinking are those that have survived the longest. Wet one's whistle can be found in Chaucer (14C), and is based on whistle\* meaning throat or mouth; booze, certainly 16C, can be found in the OED in 1300, but Partridge maintains that in this context the word means the drinking vessel and not the act of drinking. Either way, the word probably comes from the Dutch buizen or the German buzen, both meaning to drink to excess.

Hard behind them come tipple (late 16C), disguise oneself (16C, thus disguised means drunk) and crask or crush a bottle

(16C, presumably the ancestor of the 19C give a bottle a black eye and 20C hit the bottle, hit the booze, hit the jug or hit the sauce, as well as the Australian crack a bottle or crack a tube). Mug (17C) comes from the noun meaning cooling drink; its 19C usage means to bribe with drink, or to get another person drunk. The 17C also offers swig, tip and tiff and suck the bottle (thus suck-bottle: an alcoholic). Fuddle (17C) becomes a drinking bout or drunkenness in the 19C. Knock about the bub (1781) is based on **bub** (18C) which comes (like **bevvy\***) from the Latin bibere: to drink. Humming bub means strong beer, while grub and bub is food and drink. To barleybree or barleybroth come from nouns meaning strong beer, and both beer and wine are simple verb forms of the relevant nouns. Bend (18C, thus bend the elbow and crook the elbow) becomes bender, a drinking bout, in 1827. To go on the burst (19C) also relates to a binge, from burst meaning a hearty meal. So to does mop up (19C), which comes from mop, a drunkard or drinking bout; and which creates on the mop and all mops and brooms: drunk.

A number of phrases imply the pouring of liquid down one's throat. They include irrigate one's tonsils or canal (18C), lap the gutter (19C, either from gutter-alley\*:throat or gatter\*: beer), dip one's beak (19C, although dip one's bill [17C] is to be nearly drunk), damp one's mug (mid 19C, fr. damp meaning drink, a rare term, found mainly in Dickens' Pickwick Papers [1836]), do a dram, do a wet do a beer, do a bitter, etc. (mid-19C), lower a glass (19C) moisten or soak the chaffer or clay (19C, chaffer: throat; 18C clay refers to the 'mortal clay') oil the tonsils, and put one back, put a few back or put a few down.

Gross consumption is reflected in lush it up or lush it around (1810), swill, guttle (19C, probably from glutton), guzzle (fr. 18C guzzle-guts: glutton or hard drinker), liquor up (19C), load in or load up, slosh (late 19C), sluice the bolt, sluice the dominoes, sluice the ivories or sluice the gob (18-19C, all from terms for teeth), soak (20C), swipe (early 19C, to drink hastily and copiously, cf. swipes), sling a pot (1870), gargle, get a load on (20C, Aus.), get a snootful (fr. snoot: nose), get an edge on, get one's nose painted and get one going (all 20C), hoist one

(1860), inhale, knock (one) back, slop (some) down (20°C), throw one or a few down and tie one on (20°C). To drown the shamrock is to drink on St Patrick's Day while chug-a-lug (to drink down in a single draught) comes from an Australian toast of the 1950s. Look through a glass and read the maker's name (both 19°C) imply an upended, emptied container.

A final mixed bag of terms include blink, budge (1820, thus Scots budge kain [ken]: pub; the term probably comes from booze or bub), go see a man or go see a woman, make fun, malt (1813, from a shovel of malt: a pot of porter; to have malt above the wheat or have malt above the water: to be drunk), prime oneself (19C), pull, rock, save a life, shift (late 19C), squiff (19C, thus squiffy and on the squiff: drunk and squiff: a drunkard [Aus. 1920]), swizzle (19C, from swizzle: an intoxicating drink), take the pin out, take a drop in the eye, take in some o-be-joyful (19C, thus o-be-joyful house: pub), farm, pull and shicker (Yiddish, from the Hebrew shikor meaning drunk).

The Royal Navy has provided a number of drink-related terms. The most celebrated of which is **splice the mainbrace**. The mainbrace was notably hard to splice and was sited in a very dangerous place; thus when the hands had completed their task they were rewarded with a double shot of rum. Almost equally famous is **grog** (19C) used as a verb, but more commonly as a noun, to mean rum and water. The term is supposedly short for grogram (a type of cloth), and was (according to Grose) originally applied as a nickname to Admiral Vernon, known as Old Grog, from the fact of his wearing a grogram cloak. The name was transferred to the mixture which in August 1740 he ordered to be served out instead of neat spirit. **Sly grog** (19C, Aus.) is liquor sold without a license, often through a **sly-grog shop**. **Suck the monkey** or **tap the admiral** (18C) both mean to suck liquor through a straw from the ship's barrel which has been bored with a gimlet.

Other naval terms include shed a tear (19C) which as 'shed a tear for Nelson' originally meant to urinate) and shake a cloth in the wind (19C) which a century earlier had meant only to be hanged. To drink at Freeman's Quay, meaning to drink at another's expense comes from the free drinks distributed at this

quay near London Bridge to porters and carmen between 1810-80; the Navy amplified it to **Harry Freemans** (and used it for anything, not merely drink, that was free) while the Army shortened it to **Freemans**.

Other specific terms include **brownbag** (US, to drink from a 'hidden' bottle when public drinking is banned); **fall off the wagon** (to resume drinking after a period of abstinence; the wagon is short for the 'water wagon'); **wet the baby's head** (to celebrate a new birth by drinking).

To make a pearl on the nail (17C) meaning to drink, comes from the 16C custom of dropping the remaining moisture at bottom of glass onto one's nail; the custom was also known as supernaculum or supernagulum, literally 'over the nail', and meant to drink to the last drop, which one then pours onto one's left thumbnail. To stab oneself and pass the dagger (19C) was a theatrical term meaning to take a glassful then circulate the bottle; the verb stab (to drink) presumably comes from this source. To buy for the whole bar is to charter the bar or shout oneself hoarse.

#### INVITATIONS TO DRINK

The apparent inability of one drinker to ask another, 'What would you like to drink?' means that invitations to drink are often couched in slang terms. Among them are what will you have?, name your poison or nominate your poison (mid 19C), will you irrigate?, will you tod? (fr. toddy), how will you have it?, what's your medicine?, let's drive another nail (fr. coffin nail: a drink), try a little Indian, will you try a smile?, let's go and see the baby, come and see your pa. There are many others, to be gleaned from the nation's saloon bars. Responses are equally varied; among their numbers are here's into your face, here's how, don't mind if I do. To hob and nob or to hob nob is to invite to drink, and then to clink glasses.

# A DRINK

The noun drink offers a wide range of terms, most simply considered chronologically. The oldest is lap (mid-16C), from the SE

action of lapping water or any liquid; it describes any form of drink. Crater or cratur (16C, both from SE creature) were similarly applied to any drink, but have specifically meant whiskey since 19C. Go-down (mid-17C) refers to the liquid passing down the throat, as does the later common sewer (c.1860; which means variously the throat, a tippler and a whore). A flash and a bit of tape (both 18C), general in theory, usually meant gin (qv) in practice, while lush moves from its 18C meaning of strong drink to the mid-19C drinking party to the late-19C drunkard. Tift (17C) is a variation of the verb tiff: to drink.

The 19C is especially fruitful in drinking terms. Drink can be nectar or poison, if unpleasant it can be slumgullion, defined as any cheap, nasty, washy beverage or, specifically, fish offal or the watery refuse, mixed with blood and oil, which drains from blubber. Breaky-leg (1860) mutated from meaning any strong drink to whiskey only, while neck oil reflects the verb neck: to swallow, as well as the adjective oiled: tipsy. Other terms dependent on parts of the body include a shove in the mouth (1811), titty (fr. tit: breast, which offers 'milk') and a smile or fancy smile, generally used for whiskey. Cry and shout are cognate with 'My shout!', an offer to buy a round of drinks; they are both found as verbs.

The liqidity of alcohol provides damp, wet (19C, from light wet or heavy wet: respectively gin or beer) something damp and a drain (1835). Less classifiable are Timothy (Scots, possibly from the name of a real brewer), willy wacht (fr. Scots: Willy Arnot [a distiller?]: good whiskey plus wacht/waught: to drink deeply), a one, a two, a three (as said prior to tossing off a glassful), a bender (1827, originally US then UK from the meaning 'drinking spree'), old crow, tiddly, (usually as an adjective meaning tipsy), and a leaf of the old author (who presumably is God). Further terms include a ball, a bead, a bosom friend (more usually a louse) a chitchat, a dannie, a doch-an-dorrach (fr. the Scots toast and often anglicised as jock and doris) a fip, a nut (thus off one's nut meaning drunk, prior to its 20C meaning of insane).

The 20C is less fruitful, although many earlier terms remain in common use. New coinages include waxer (Merchant Navy), and three Australianisms: nobbler, rosiner (1930) and turps (1930).

Some specific terms include jigger stuff (1820) meaning a secret still; the term comes from jigger meaning a key, which locks up the still; thus jig-water or jigger mean bootleg liquor. A leg opener is drink when it is used for seduction; one for the ditch or one for the road is a farewell drink; the best-known hangover cure is a hair of the dog, coined as early as 1546 and based on the belief that the burnt hair of a dog is an antidote to its bite.

A number of terms equate alcohol with medicine. They include medicine itself, bracer (19C), gargle (mid-19C), tonic (late 19C), and lotion (1876). Tincture, much beloved of *Private Eye's* 'Dear Bill' correspondence is a 1960s coinage. Other terms are pickmeup (1867) reviver, (late 19C, also used as a verb; with the combination corpse reviver: a hangover cure), rince (also a verb), a cheerer (late 18C), an invigorator, a quencher (19C), a soother and a refresher (1841). Pill (late 19C) has some medicinal qualities, but it also means a means cannon ball or bullet, and thus relates equally to slug or pistol-shot, below. A settler (mid 18C) is a parting drink, 'one for the road', which supposedly settles the stomach after an evening's indulgence.

Many terms for drink echo the short, sharp shock one receives on knocking back a glass of neat spirits. These terms offer hit and jag (both taken from 20C drug use, although to be out on a jag or have a jag on -both meaning out on a drinking spree -date to 17C), a jolt (1900, originally Canadian and latterly Aus.; both particularly used of brandy), a shot (US early 20C), and a slug (18C, any kind of strong liquor). Similar are a go (18C), which originally meant a three-halfpenny bowl of gin and water, especially that sold at the well-known Go Shop; by 1800 it meant drink in general, a taste or drop (of the creature), a gasp (1880), sniffler (1880) and a snort (1920), all of which stem from the physical reactions that follows a hit of strong drink), a squirt (late 19C, otherwise champagne) a snifter (US mid-19C and latterly UK), a sneezer (1820, also used as a verb: to sneeze), a dash (usually as 'a dash of...' although in 1660 a dash was a tavern waiter, possibly from his dashing about), a nip, nipper or nipperkin (cf: nipitate\*; the verb to nip means to catch or take smartly), an invigorator, a pistol shot (19C, cf. slug), a toothful (1920) and a warmer.

Time also influences one's drinking, as these terms bear out. Eye-opener, rouser, livener (all 19C) denote the first drink of the day, as does the 20C phlegm-cutter. A forenoon, dew bit, dewdrop and dewdrink imply drinks before breakfast, especially as taken by farm-workers, whose traditional day was once divided into dewbit, elevenses, fourses and morn-bit.

An appetiser and an anti-lunch precede what may, if unaccompanied by food, be termed a liquid lunch (20C). Whitewash is a glass of sherry taken as the finale after a meal spent drinking port and claret while a white-washer is a glass of white wine taken at end of dinner. A corker or caulker literally 'puts the head or cork on' and is thus the last drink of the evening — probably a brandy. Finally a reposer (1870) is a nightcap.

Many terms for drink are also used to denote a measure of alcohol, or of the glass into which it is placed. Best known is **peg**. Popular etymology suggests that each drink is a 'peg' or 'nail' in one's coffin, but although a **coffin nail** (these days more usually equated with a cigarette) did mean a drink in the 19C (thus **put another nail** in one's coffin: to take another drink), the OED lays down that these pegs are 'one of a set of pins fixed at intervals in a drinking vessel as marks to measure the quantity which each drinker was to drink'. **Peg out\***: to die, comes from the same divided tankard.

Less well-known measures-as-drinks are flicker (19C, a glass), muzzler (19C, from muzzle: mouth), jorum or joram (a drinking bowl), shant (a quart or pint pot; thus shanting means drinking and a shant of gatter, a pot of beer), a sneaker (1710: large covered cup/saucer) and a dandy (19C, a small tumbler), both of which were used for punch. A dodger (1824), an out (19C) and a facer held a dram of spirits while a Johnny (1860, from Johnny Walker, the famous brand, known in the 20C as Johnny Red from the label) was a half glass of whiskey. In Ayrshire a glass of spirits was a bucket. A bumper (1660) is a full glass, a term much beloved of bodice-ripping novelists. A pony (19C, originally US) is a small glass of beer, while a sleeve button is a long drink, probably allied to the better known sleever, a long beer glass, usually referred to in pubs as a 'straight' glass, as opposed to the shorter, dimpled glasses.

Lounce (19C naut.) comes from SE 'allowance' and is also used to mean a ration of food). A heeltap or a snuff refers to the liquor left at the bottom of a glass; thus creating the cry: 'No heeltaps': 'Drain your glasses'. A modicum, a modest quencher (19C) and a quantum (1840, from the Latin: 'enough') all denote a small measure. A slight sensation (1859, Aus: a half glass of sherry, UK: a quartern of gin) continue the theme of relative self-denial. A nick is a short measure, a term based on the 'nick' or bump in the bottom of tankard; nick also means a publican (as does nickum).

#### TYPES OF DRINKS

Apart from beer, whiskey, gin and brandy, which are sufficiently well-represented to earn their own sections below, slang has thrown up a number of terms for the wide varieties of drinks on offer. Any adulterated wine or mixed drink was categorised as balderdash, drinks mixed with water were baptised or christened. Those left untouched were primitive. Upstairs meant spirits, which were usually kept on a special high shelf in the pub, while suit and cloak (rhy. sl., presumably from soak) meant any drink, although usually brandy. Sick wine was off, while Gladstone was cheap claret (a reference to the Prime Minister Gladstone's reduction, in 1860, of the duty on French wine) and a mix of claret with lemonade was a spider. Peter See Me was a Spanish wine, properly named Pedra Ximenes and named for the famous Cardinal Port was bullock's eye or kill-priest (fr. the alleged clerical consumption thereof) or, if second-rate, treacle; sherry was white wash or white fustian, while port or claret was red fustian (fustian in both cases being originally in SE a coarse cloth and possibly used in contrast to gin's 'smooth' satin\*). Other terms for champagne include bub, fizz, dry, bitches' wine (cf. cat's water\*), cham, chammy, sham, shammy and simpkin. Boy, also champagne, comes from King Edward VII's habit during a shoot of having a page near at hand with an open bottle; when he required a drink he would merely call, 'Boy' and his glass would be promptly refilled. Smash was iced brandy and water and rob-davy or roberdavy was metheglin or spiced mead; the word comes from the Welsh meddyglyn, a combination of *meddyg* healing or medicinal and *llyn*: liquor. **Davy** was presumably a reference to the Welsh name, usually found as Taffy. A **cinder** (mid-19C) is any strong drink that has been mixed with water, tea or lemonade, while a **cooler** (19C), refers to ale, stout or porter taken after spirits.

#### HOT DRINKS

Hot alcoholic drinks abounded in the 18C and 19C, although their numbers are drastically reduced today. Almost the sole survivor is **toddy** (also used as a verb), although there are, of course, many cocktails (albeit cold), each bearing its own name.

Such hot concoctions included hot flannel (heated gin and beer with nutmeg, sugar and spices), hot tiger (spiced ale and sherry), hot pot (ale and brandy), huckle my butt or huckle my buff (egg and brandy heated), humpty-dumpty (ale and brandy boiled), lamb's wool (hot ale, spiced, sweetened and mixed with the pulp of roast apples), locomotive (Burgundy, curacao, egg yolks, honey and cloves all heated together), meat and drink (strong drink in general, but specifically liquor thickened with egg yolks), merry-go-down (hot strong ale), stone fence (brandy and ale), purl (beer warmed nearly to boiling, mixed with gin or wormwood, sugar and ginger), samson (brandy, cider, sugar and water), soap suds (hot gin and water, with lemon and lump sugar), flip (1690, hot small beer and brandy, sweetened), a bishop (warm wine and sugar with either oranges or lemons) and larkin (a very strong spiced punch, created in the Raj).

# GIN

'No Gin, No King!' declared the London mob, protesting a proposed increase in the tax on their favourite tipple in 1736, and few drinks have played so central a part in a culture. 'Liquid madness', Thomas Carlyle called it in 1839, and a century earlier Alexander Pope welcomed the legislation to curb consumption of the 'spirituous liquor, the exorbitant use of which had almost destroyed the lowest rank of the People'. The People, as ever, simply paid the added cost, and gin remained a vital ingredient of 18C

and 19C life. Naturally, it generated a good deal of slang, much of it testament to the spirit's raw power.

One of the earliest of such terms was daffy or Daffy's elixir (18C) which in 1709 appears as the proprietary name of a popular remedy known as the 'soothing syrup'. Such comforts were at the heart of gin drinking; the transference was simple. The term persisted into the late 19C, although by then it meant tincture of senna. Other 18C terms include bob (also used to mean a large beer jug, holding a gallon), diddle (1720), jackey (1799), max (the best quality and like today's max out and to the max from SE maximum), the twin flash of lightning and clap of thunder, royal poverty and royal bob, lap (although this could applied to any drink) as could wibble to any weak drink, and tittery (fr. its affect on the drinker, and as such like the 20C giggle-juice).

Into the new century and one finds Lady Dacre's wine (cited in the Lexicon Balatronicum of 1811 but without, alas, further specification of the lady in question), light wet (1820, while heavy wet meant porter or stout; calls for 'a pint of heavy' are still regularly heard in Scottish pubs), mother's milk (1820), which antedates the more recent mother's ruin (20C); mother's blessing, also 19C, is laudanum, a mix of brandy and tincture of opium, often used to keep the children quiet. Gin could also be the right sort (1820), the rhyming slang Brian O'Lynn or Brian O'Flynn, the cream of the valley (mid 19C, paralleling mountain dew meaning whiskey), stark-naked and strip-me-naked (both raw gin). Dead-eye and deady (1819) referred to a well-known of distiller, as did Old Tom. This particularly potent gin was named, according to Brewer, for one Thomas Norris, who was employed at Hodges' distillery and who opened a gin palace in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden. The drink in which he specialised was concocted by another Hodges' employee, Thomas Chamberlain, who christened his brand in honour of Mr Norris. Taking 'Tom' in its feline sense gives cat's water, a cousin of bitch's wine (champagne) and presumably of the modern cat's pee or piss. although this means weak, rather than potent drink.

Other terms include satin, ribbon and tape, the latter pair stemming from the former term, itself presumably indicative of the

smoothness of good gin. All three terms are responsible for such combinations as sky-blue, light blue, blue tape and blue ribbon (all 19C) plus white tape, white satin (still a proprietary name for a brand of gin), white lace, white ribbon, white wine, (all 19C, bar white tape which is 18C); blue ruin is an extension.

Other 19C terms include eye water (c.1820, which is what strong gin produces), frog's wine (mid 19C, fr. froglander meaning not French but Dutchman), misery (1820), juniper (19C, from its primary constituent), Fuller's Earth (early 19C, from its property as a scourer and 'cleaner out'), snopsy (US, fr. schnapps) and squareface (fr. the shape of the bottle, although Germans were known as squareheads and schnapps was a German drink), tangle-leg (19C, from its effect, cf. tangle-foot: whiskey), unsweetened and twankey (1890s, twankey, in the jargon of the tea trade meant green tea).

#### BEER

For all its popular image as a staple of British culture, beer offers fewer slang terms than gin; perhaps the relative wholesomeness of the former, as is often the case in slang, naturally creates less synonyms than the latter, with its 'glamourous' if negative image.

Early terms for beer include John Barleycorn (17C), stingo (17C, from its powerful 'sting'), barley broth and oil of barley (18C, both strong), act of parliament (18C, from the weak 'small beer' supplied free to the British army), English burgundy (18C, predating 19C British champagne), half and half, (18C, a mix of ale and beer). Single broth and swipes (18C) meant small beer as did the 19C down (up was bottled ale). Nippitato, nippitate or nippitatum meant strong drink in general, while other strong beers include stride-wide, swell-nose, pharoah, huff (which makes one huffy; it is also used as a verb), stitch-back and humming ale, while upsee-Dutch, upsee-English and upsee-Freese were all strong enough to knock one over; but upsee, while apparently cognate with 'upsy-daisy', is in fact derived from the Dutch op-zee and means 'overseas', and thus imported. Lull is simply ale while october is ale (or cider) brewed in October. 19C

terms include artesian (as brewed in Australia), bevy and bevvy (either from Parlyaree or simply an abbreviation of beverage; the root in either case is the Latin bibere: to drink; bevvy also means a public house; a bevvy merchant is a heavy drinker), bungjuice, (fr. SE bung, the stopper of a barrel), bunker (either from a coal bunker at which one fuels up or from Lingua Franca bona acqua: good water), gatter (possibly from a mix of acqua and water?), heavy wet (cf. light wet) was porter as was thick, knock (me) down,pong, pongelow or ponjello (all used in the Indian Army; thus pong: to drink). The backslang reeb means beer, thus top of reeb: a pot of beer.

Beer was also **rosin** (18C), a term based on the SE *rosin*: to supply oneself with drink, and underpinning Henry Fielding's punning riddle in *The Pleasures of the Town* (1729) 'A fiddlestick is a drunkard: Why? Because it loves ros'ning.' It could also be **whistle** (usually the throat; the **whistling shop** was a room in the King's Bench prison where one could buy drink illicitly). **Tipper** was a unique ale named for the Brighton brewer Thomas Tipper; it was brewed from notably brackish water which came from one specific well.

Swankey or swankey swipes (19C) meant the best beet: fr. swanky: pretentious and swipes: beer, as did benbouse (literally 'good drink'). Bad beer, whether sour, inferior or simply weak, was variously rotgut (16C), belch and belly-vengeance (both 19C), stinkibus (18C), bum clink (19C, from Midlands dial.), purge (19C), bilgewater, whip belly ('thin as a whip') and skin disease (spec. fourpenny ale). Other weak brews included swish-swash water-bewitched, slops, and taplash (specifically the dregs).

# BRANDY

Brandy, a less populist liquor, has relatively few terms. They include nantz and cold nantz (both from Nantes in France, a centre of Cognac production), French elixir, French cream, French article and French lace (all 19C but the 18C cream), cold tea (17C), bingo (18C, on the model of stingo\* or possibly from SE binge), ball of fire (19C, which with its image of a cannonball relates to the military to fire a slug, meaning drink a dram) and

red tape (18C, on the model of blue tape or white tape, both meaning gin).

#### WHISKEY

Whiskey rules as Scotland's national drink, although some slang synonyms — breaky-leg, the curse of Scotland and family disturbance—seem to point up its pitfalls rather than its pleasures. Less minatory terms include barley bree, caper juice, corn juice, cappie and farintosh.

The hard stuff (late 19C), forty rod lightning (19C, cheap and strong whiskey) and white lightning all attest to whiskey's power, while shine (US 19C) and moonshine (UK 18C) both refer to contraband or illicitly distilled whiskey. Moonshine had different meanings according to the county: in Sussex and Kent it referred to white brandy, in Yorkshire to gin. Mountain dew (US) began life in 1816 as whiskey; the image of contraband emerges in 1823.

Rough whiskey can be redeye (19C, it makes the eyes go red) or white eye (19C, one's eyes apparently roll up in their sockets, exposing the whites). Screech (fr. its affect on women) and kill the beggar are equally unpalatable, if effective. Simon pure (19C) and the real thing (used usually of people, but here of a spirit) imply the finest quality Scotch. Other terms include old man's milk (mid 19C, cf. mother's milk), railroad, sit on a rock, a glister of fish-hooks (a glass of Irish whiskey), grapple the rails (18C, from its effects: one had to hang on to keep standing up) and the 19C rhy. sl. gay and frisky. Australians drank stringy-bark, normally the name of a tree.

# GLASSES, MEASURES, ETC.

Miscellaneous terms mainly focused on the size of of glass include chicken (a pint pot), flicker (a glass), gage (a quart pot), rouse (a large glass), Salisbury (17C, a gallon pot of wine with a tap), size (a half pint, from the 16C term for the portion of bread and beer allowed to undergraduates in Cambridge colleges), a small cheque (1880, a dram; thus to knock down a cheque: to spend all one's money on alcohol), a toothful (1920, a dram, fr. the

Scottish toothful: to tipple), a snake in the grass (19C rhy. sl. for both looking and drinking glass, either of which might prove a treacherous friend), sneaker (early 18C, a small bowl or a large glass jug used for of punch), a tall boy (a large wine glass, or two-quart pot filled with wine). Tears of the tankard (17C) were drink stains on one's clothes and a Tom and Jerry shop (c.1835), was a cheap tavern. Tom and Jerry, two fictional men about town created by Pierce Egan in his book Life in London, or Days and Nights of Jerry Hawthorne and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom (1821) lent their name both to this low inn (although the plain jerry shop, with the same meaning but no bearing on the book, can be found a year earlier), and to a highly spiced punch (which is still being drunk in Damon Runyon's short stories more than a century later).

An empty bottle is variously a dead soldier, camp candlestick, corpse, dummy, dead marine, dead recruit, fellow commoner, and a dead 'un.

# DRUNK

'No man must call a Good-fellow Drunkard...But if at any time they spie that defect in another, they may without any forfeit...say, He is Foxt, He is Flaw'd, He is Fluster'd, He is Suttle, Cupshot, Cut in the Leg or Back, He hath seen the French King, He hath swallowed an Hair or a Tavern-Token, he hath whipt the Cat, he hath been at the scriveners and learned to make Indentures, He hath bit his Grannam, or is it by a Barn Weasel.' Thus the 17C compiler of a wealth of 'tavern terms', codified as The English Liberal Science: or a new-found Art and order of Drinking. The pamphlet lists around 150 terms, their number has been in no way diminished over the intervening three centuries.

Before turning to a variety of specific categories, it's worth listing some of the many similes that have been coined to mean intoxicated. The key words are, obviously **drunk** itself, plus **pissed** and **tight**, all of which are effectively interchangeable. Some terms will

be found listed with etymology or date below, others seem to have neither rhyme nor reason, other than that they are, or have been, widely used. Full tends to preface phrases that originated, at least, in Australia; lit terms are mainly American, while pissed covers the UK and Australia only: in the US it means primarily angry.

Drunk as a: bastard, a bat, a beggar, a besom, a big owl, boiled owl, brewer's fart, a cook, a coon, a coot or a cooter, a dog, a fiddler, a fiddler's bitch, a fish, a fly, a fowl, a Gosport fiddler, a hog, a king, a little red wagon, a log, a lord, a monkey, a Perraner, a pig, a piper, a poet, a rolling fart, a sailor, a skunk (in a trunk), a sow, a swine, a tapster, a tick, a top, a wheelbarrow, as Davy's sow, to the pulp. Pissed: as a fart, as a newt (thus 20°C newted), as a rat, to the ears. Stewed (18°C) as a prune, to the eyebrows, the gills.

Full: as a boot, a bull, an egg, a fairy's phonebook, a fiddler, a goat, googy egg, a lord, as a pig's ear, a seaside shithouse on Boxing Day (in Australia Christmas falls in mid-summer), a state school hatrack, the family po, a tick, two race trains, to the gills. Lit: to the gills; lit up: like Broadway, a Christmas tree, Main Street, a store window, Times Square. Loaded: to the barrel, the earlobes, the gills, the guards, the gunnels, the hat, the muzzle, the Plimsoll mark and the tailgate.

# **CONFUSED**

Aside from those terms which, logically enough, refer directly to the drink that one has so foolishly consumed, one of the largest sub-categories of this area of the slang vocabulary is a group essentially meaning 'confused' or 'muddle-headed'.

Taking them in rough chronological order the 17C gives the understated concerned, foxed (fr. fox: to make drunk) and having a piece of bread and cheese in the head. The 18C has muddled, bemused, dizzy, fuddled and muzzy (either an abbrev. of bemused or possibly from the dialect mosey: confused or tipsy). Awry means confused but the contemporary phrase 'tread the shoe awry' means to fall from virtue. Jiggered too has a parallel meaning: contraband or secret, based on jigger stuff\*, a secret still.

As well as the relatively quotidian terms moony, muggy, noddy (one's head nods), oddish, flummoxed, flustered, foggy, fuzzy, mixed, obfuscated and woozy, the 19C has all at sea, off one's nut, fluffy and fluffed (fr. the theatrical fluff) and a selection of endearing phrases, including can't see a hole in a ladder or can't see through a ladder, can't say Naval Intelligencer, can't find one's arse with both hands, can't hit the ground with one's hat, plus having a guest in the attic and being queer in the attic. The period also offers seeing double and seeing pink elephants (although elephant's trunk is simply rhy. sl. for drunk, while to see the elephant plain and simple means to see the world. To have been bang through the elephant is to have plumbed the depths of dissipation, although bang up to the Elephant, meaning excellent, refers to the Elephant and Castle Tavern, one of South London's best-known pubs. Other drunken visions include the bats and the bears.

Wet (16C), damp and sozzled (both 19C, the latter either from the dialect term sozzly meaning sloppy or wet, or the US sozzle: to moisten) and coming from Liquor Pond Street (19C) are succeeded by the 20C's all wet. Other modern terms include flying blind, mizzled, schizzed (fr. schizophrenic; cf. schitzi\*), vegetable, globular (possibly from 'going round in circles'), goofy, bleary, far gone, gaga\*, looped (fr. loopy: crazy), not all there and its semantic relation out to lunch, out of one's head and out of one's mind (also used in a drug context). Buzzed means confused here, although both drink and drugs can offer a buzz or sensation. Wollied, from the popular 1980s term wolly\* or wally: a fool, implies the foolishness that can accompany too much alcohol. A final coinage is pixillated, which began life in the Frank Capra film Mr Deedes Comes to Town (1936) and was allegedly an elision of 'pixy-led'. Used initially to mean crazy, it soon gained its secondary, and now more general meaning.

# UNSTEADY

From confusion in the head springs unsteadiness on the feet. The weaving drunk makes indentures with his legs (17C, from the

custom of indenting the top edges of legal documents), is out of register (19C, from the printers' jargon for badly set type) or carries a turkey on his back (19C, fr. drive turkeys to market: to be unable to walk straight). He is skew-whiff or squiffy (19C, from either skew-whiff or from swipes\*: beer), tweeked (which has a sense of being moved slightly out of true), slewed, listing to starboard, rolling, helpless (19C) or in difficulty. Tostificated (19C, a mispronunciation of intoxicated and so used, but later also associated with tossed or tost, and used as meaning tossed about. distracted, perplexed; thus tussy: a drunk) and low in the saddle his condition is topsy boozy or topsy frizy (both from the SE topsy-turvey). His arse on backwards, he has the blind staggers, and walks on his cap-badge (upside-down), or on rocky socks (both 20C). He can feel swinny (19C, from dial. swinny: giddy) and swivelly (19C, unsteady). Pushed (19C, perhaps fr. 'did he fall or was he pushed?), lame and legless, he loses his rudder, goes belly up, is gravelled or gets the gravel rash (19C) and starts watching the ant races and lapping the gutter (19C). Collapsed, he lies below the mahogany (fr. mahogany: bar) or under the table.

# HIT

Images of violence abound in slang terms for being drunk. Aside from the early jug-bitten (17C), swattled (17C, fr swaddle: beat up, hit) and going down with barrel fever (18C, resurrected in 20C Australia to mean the DTs), the hapless sufferer has been variously basted (baste: SE thrash), belted, blasted, blitzed, boiled, bombed, fractured, fried, hammered, shellacked, totalled, trashed, twisted, wrecked, sloshed (19C) smashed, shattered (1960s), croaked, crooked, damaged (19C), done over, overshot, and found dead-oh (19C). Similar terms include floored (19C), cupshot (16C), pot-shot and pot sick (19C), scammered (19C), chucked (19C), clinched, shot and shot in the neck (19C, neck as throat), clobbered, crocked and crocko, swacked and swacko, squashed, embalmed, laid out, snockered, wasted (20C, from waste\*: kill), wazzocked and whazood

(20C, possibly from wasted\*, but equally likely onomatopoeic). Spiflicated or (more rarely) smifligated, which seems tailormade for a school story of the 1950s, is actually an 18C coinage, originally meaning confounded or silenced, thence progressing to mean beat up, thrash or kill.

The 17th and 18th centuries are also responsible for a number of 'violent' phrases: bitten or hit on the head by the tavern bitch, hunt a tavern fox, and bite one's grannam (fr. grannam: corn) are all 17C; bitten by a barn-mouse or by a weasel are 18C. To bite one's name in: to drink heavily is 19C.

World War I offers three terms: plastered (fr. the RFC slang plaster: to drop bombs), gassed and stonkered, used originally to mean put out of action, and rooted in the 18C stonicker: a military flogging. The theme of whipping also appears in stretched (20C), which may come from from 'have one's breeches stretched' and thus to be beaten.

#### HIGH

The concept of being 'high' is one that is generally assumed to be a 20C coinage, and as such related to the explosion in recreational drug use of the 1960s, but the idea, if not the word, goes back much further. Hanced (17C) is an abbreviation of enhanced which gives way in the following century to elevated and exalted (used by Dryden in *The Bloody Duke* [1690]). Similar terms include in the half altitudes, fired up, feeling and flying high, high (as a kite), in orbit, and the quintessential drug term: stoned, which meant drunk long before it ever meant drugged.

# DRINK-RELATED TERMS

Drink, and the act of drinking, as one might imagine, lies behind a number of terms that describe the subsequent effects. Typical are a group prefaced by on: on the booze, the grog, the piss, the sauce, the batter, the beer, the bend and the fuddle, but there are many more.

Swipey (19C, from swipes\*: thin beer), nappy (18C, also meaning strong ale), winey (19C), poggled (19C, from poggle:

rum), corned (18C), malted and malty (18C), groggy (which has substantially abandoned its alcoholic origins, but in fact stems from grog\*), beery, aled up, mulled (up), (fr. mulled ale?) ginned (up) (20C) and chateaued (20C, punning on both shattered\* and on the 'Chateau' found in the names of clarets) all refer to given drinks. Terms standing for drink in general lie behind pickled and salted (18C), juiced (20C), laced, (17C, from SE meaning mixed with spirits), likkered (liquored), lushy (fr. lush\*), swizzled (19C), alkied (20C), all keyhole (punning on alcohol) and oiled and well oiled (18C, from neck oil\* meaning drink; thus the 'oiled oiled story': tipsy maundering).

Stung (20°C Australia) comes from stingo\*, a strong ale, pruned (19°C) from prune-juice: hard liquor. Tubed (20°C) is based on the Australian tube\*: a can of beer, incog (19°C) is another pun, referring both to disguised\* (drunk) and cogue (a dram) as is grapeshot (19°C, cf: cupshot). Mashed (19°C) comes from the brewer's mash; thus mash-tub: brewer; the defunct newspaper the Morning Advertiser was known as the 'Morning Mashtub' because of its brewery interests. Pogy and podgy (18°C) come either from the Italian poco acqua, literally 'a little water', the Romany pogado: crooked, thus the way one walks, or poggle\*.

The act of drinking creates crooking the elbow (19C), looking through a glass, lifting the little finger, elbow or hand (18C), talking to Jamie Moore (Scots, 19C) and trying Taylor's best (fr. Taylor's port). Get the malt above the wheat warns of the results of injudicious mixing, while drink out of the island (18C) means to drink to the bottom of a wine bottle, with its inverted glass 'island'.

Boozed, boozed up and bowsered, swilled and overtaken (by drink) are all 16C, while the 19C offers a variety of additional terms: comboozelated, swiggled (fr. swig), stolled (fr. stoll: to drink, possibly originating in the Norfolk dial stole: to drink), bagged (fr. in the bag; bag was printers jargon for a pot of beer, thus put one's head in the bag: to drink), poddy and poted (fr. pot\* and SE potation), slopped (slopping up: a drinking bout) battered (fr. batter: a pub crawl) and bevvied (fr. bevvy\*); bubbed (fr. bub\*) gives budgy, which in turn created buffy.

Shaved comes from shave: a drink, possibly from the excuse 'I'm just off for a shave.' 20C terms include those based on liquor containers — bottled, jarred (fr. the container, but also from jarhead\*: drunkard), boxed (although 17C box: a small inn), potted, canned and tanked (fr. tankard.) Corked refers either to the SE cork or to an abbreviation of corkscrewed, which itself is synonymous, as is pot valiant, with Dutch courage\*: liquor-based bravado. A further group rely on alcohol's wetness: lubricated, melted (also meaning to have spent all one's cash on drink), saturated, sauced, soaked, get one's soul in soak, sodden, soused and have a skinful. Snootered comes from snoot\*: nose, and gives get a snootful.

Less classifiable terms include in one's cups (16-18C, then SE), Taverned, corky (17C) and smelling of the cork (19C), taking one over the eight (a World War I coinage, with reference to the 'acceptable' consumption of eight pints of beer), a peg too low (19C, from the 16C pegged tankard, with its pins marking each drinker's measure), to have drunk more than one has bled and to have been driving the brewer's horse (19C), to swallow a tavern token (17C), bosky (18C, not from the SE bosky meaning wooded, but possibly from Spanish boquiesw: dry mouthed), noggy (fr. noggin), nase and nazy (18C, cf: nazie cove or nazie mort\*) and black-pot (16C, from SE black pot: a beer mug).

#### **FULL**

As well as the group of 'saturated' images above, drunkenness also denotes the sense of being full, and in a number of cognate phrases, of actually overflowing. Full, spelt, or at least pronounced as 'fou' is originally Scottish, and produces such combinations as bitch-fou, greetin' fou (lit. 'crying drunk'), piper fou, roaring fou and pissing fou. John Bull is Aus. rhy. sl. for full. Faced (17C) comes from facer: a brimming glass) and flush(ed) (19C) indicates liquid that is flush with the rim of the glass. Topped up (20C), top heavy (17C), having a brick in the hat (19C) or being up in one's hat continue as do in liquor and dipping rather deep.

The idea of physical excess informs a number of phrases, typically get one's shoes full (the inference is not merely of beer, but probably of urine), have one's back teeth afloat or under (19C), awash and decks-awash, buoyant, needing a reef taken in, getting a full cargo and carrying a load (20C, thus carry ballast: to hold one's liquor). Half seas over (16C) may continue the naval imagery, but it may also be linked to op-zee zober, from the Dutch meaning 'over-seas strong beer' (and thus linked to such names as upsee-Dutch\* and upsee-Freeze\*). Half the bay over is a later version. More navy terms include boated, overseas, over the bar (19C), oversparred and three sheets to the wind (both 19C, both carrying a further element of top-heaviness). Getting the yellow fever (19C) originated in the system at the Greenwich Naval Hospital whereby inmate sailors who were caught drunk had to wear a mainly yellow particoloured coat.

#### **OUT ON A SPREE**

For all the dire warnings of physical collapse, drinking can be fun. Thus a selection of terms relating to parties and pleasurable drunkenness. Among them are on a brannigan (19C US, brannigan: spree), on a tipple, on the floor, on the fritz, on the loose (20C, Aus.), on the ramble, on the rantan, on the reeraw, on the rampage, on the spree, on the muddle, on the skyte and on a skate (20C, Royal Navy use, with skate also meaning a trouble-making sailor). Scooped (19C) comes from on the scoop: on the spree).

Feeling funny (19C), feeling good, feeling no pain (20C) and feeling right royal mean just what they say, and optimistic drinkers are further represented in about right (19C), at rest, bright in the eye (19C), get a jag on and jagged (18C, jag: a drunken spree), primed, stoked (20C Aus.), teed up, geed (up), giffed (20C from TGIF: Thank God It's Friday), glad, glowing (19C), maxed and maxed out (this pair a good century earlier than the Valley Girl/hip-hop usage of the 1980s), off nicely, roaring, (19C, meaning exuberant, but cf. the 16C roaring boy\* and girl\*), well away (20C), taking it easy (19C), chirping

merry (17C), electrified, fettled and in fine fettle (19C, both from Northern dialect), looking lively (19C) gay (19C), golded, glorious (18C, a literary coinage by Robert Burns), happy (18C) jolly, hearty (19C), heady (17C) inspired, mellow (17C, three centuries ahead of the drug use), miraculous, (19C, Scots), salubrious (19C), spiffed (19C), snug (19C) and spreeish (19C).

Kisk and kisky (19C) are either rhyming slang for whiskey, (although Julian Franklyn's dictionary omits them) or from the Romany kushto: feeling good or happy, and as such the root of cushty, the much-used epithet of television's Del-Boy Trotter.

#### ILL

Optimism notwithstanding, drunkenness is not generally seen as an admirable or even desirable state and the negative terminology far outweighs the positive.

Addled, afflicted (18C), far gone, flawed, polluted (20C) putrid, reeking, stinking (20C), stinko (Aus., where it also means wine), skunked, muckibus (18C, cf. stinkibus\*), paralysed (19C), paralytic, palatic (early 20C), petrified, ripe and rotten (20C, Australia) are all unequivocal in their condemnation. Smeekit (19C, Scots) comes from smeek: infect, and the 'patient' is variously bug-eyed, cock-eyed, cross-eyed, pop-eyed, pie-eyed (out of focus, i.e. pied), bung-eyed (18C, from bung: the stopper of a barrel; thus bung one's eye: to drink heartily) and blind (18C, abbrev. of blind drunk), mortal or mortallious (19C: fr. mortal drunk) and even dead, from dead drunk. Rigid and stiff (20C) continue the image of death. One might also suffer a thick head, burn with a low blue flame or burn one's shoulder.

Further body-related terms include arseholed (mid-20C) from the 19C pissed as arseholes, and shitfaced (20C), ratted and rat-arsed (both from the 17C rat: a drinker, itself allied to drunk as a rat, inked (19C, Aus.) and iced to the eyebrows (20C), ripped (to the tits), skulled (20C, also meaning crazy), raddled (17C), rammaged (18C), hickey and hicciusdoccius (18C, both possibly from hiccupping).

Knocked up, lumpy and sewed up (all 19C) all have the parallel meaning of pregnant, while in the blues, in the shakes and in the horrors infer actual or incipient delirium tremens. Cut, still in general use, dates to 1650, when it was an abbreviation of cut in the back or in the leg. One could thus cut one's leg or get a cut leg. Half-cut (19C), implies an earlier stage of drunkenness, as do half-cocked, half-gone, half-slewed and half-shot. The emotional wear and tear of being under the influence (20C, 'of alcohol' is unspoken), can make one quick tempered or snuffy (19C), but the best-known of such euphemisms is Private Eye's tired and emotional, an old journalistic cliché, with the cognate tired, flaked and flako (fr. flaked out: exhausted).

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

A number of terms defy categorisation, and remain outside the sections above. They include the popular, if somewhat dated tight (cf. screwed), three examples of rhyming slang - Brahms and Lizst and hit and missed (20C, both pissed) and tiddly (20C, tiddlywink: drink, and thus pub) - plus the backslang kennurd (drunkard). In addition come commode-hugging drunk (20C), in which state one speaks to the great white telephone (i.e. vomits into the lavatory), moppy and all mops and brooms (both from mop\*: drunkard), ploughed and been at a ploughing match (19C), bummed (20C, possibly related to the drug term bummer\*: a bad 'trip'), blued (19C), shickered (20C, from Yiddish shicker\*), clear (17C, very drunk) dry, frustrated, out of funds and hard-up (19C), martin drunk, pepst (16C), queered (19C), starchy (19C) so-so and so (19C), yaupish, yaupy and yappy, (19C, either from yap: talkative, or the Yorks. dial.: an idiot), what-nosed and whistle drunk (18C, so drunk that speech degenerates into whistling).

Phrases include in the tank, in the wrapper, over the top (20°C), under the weather (mid-19°C), bullet-proofed, polled off (20°C, from get on the pole: to become drunk). Among the verbs are to have a bit on (19°C), have one's eyes opened, bet one's kettle, go Borneo, go for veg, go to Mexico, hang or

tie one on, have a buzz on, have a few too many, have a heat on, have one's pots on, kill one's dog (presumably the black dog of a hangover; cf: hair of the dog), lay and pepper 'em up (both AA) and show it.

One can also have the sun in one's eyes, get the flavour, (19°C), get one's nuff (ie. have enough), have been barring too much, making Ms and Ts (punning on 'MT': empty bottles, and cognate with Moll Thompson's mark [18°C], in which 'MT' is inscribed on empty packages), shaking a cloth in the wind (19°C, with an earlier meaning of being hanged), wearing the barley cap or the head large (the latter implying a hangover), copping the brewer, letting the finger ride the thumb (fr. finger and thumb: rhyming slang for rum? or from supernagulum\*), seeing the devil (18°C) and taking a shard to shoe the goose (17°C, with an inference of wasting time on a futile project).

### THE HANGOVER

Finally comes the drunkard's nemesis: the morning after the night before, the hangover (itself a slang coinage of c.1910, but long since absorbed into SE). Terms for alcoholic agonies—whether a simple hangover or fullscale delirium tremens—include a head, pink spiders and pink elephants (19C), DTs, the shakes or Joe Blakes (20C, Aus. rhy. sl.), blue devils, black dog (19C, better known as the name of Winston Churchill's bouts of, possibly brandy-induced, melancholia), rats, snakes in the boots, heebie-jeebies, jams or jim jams, jerks, jumps, quart-mania, snakes in the boots, triangles (either from tremens or because the sufferer sees everything 'out of the square'), bottleache, gallon distemper (19C), barrel-fever, hot coppers (19C, a dry throat), being stale drunk, trembles, uglies, horrors, hyps, and rams.

To vomit is to shoot (19C) or whip the cat (17C), cast up accounts (17C), audit one's accounts at the court of Neptune (19C) and sling a cat (19C). The general feeling of illness underpins having a mouth like the inside of an Arab's underpants. Taking a drink to recover from, or at least postpone the hangover is to take a hair of the dog, from the belief that

burning the hair of a dog that has bitten one will ensure one's safety from possible rabies.

# MONEY

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

Introducing the 1867 edition of his Slang Dictionary, John Camden Hotten noted that, "Money", it has been well remarked, "the bare simple word itself, has a sonorous, significant ring in its sound" and might have sufficed...for all ordinary purposes. But a vulgar or "fast" society has thought differently, and so we have slang synonyms...' He went on to comment on the many terms in a lengthy list 'which for copiousness, I will engage to say, is not equalled by any other vulgar or unauthorised language in Europe.' Along with sex and drink, money remains one of the most productive sources of slang terminology, and if in 1867 'Her Majesty's coin' was 'insulted by no less than 130 distinct slang words' then almost 130 years on, the list has only increased.

Slang terms for money reflect its pivotal role in society. Both the abstract - its needfulness, its underpinning of social and commercial transactions - and the concrete - its colour, shape, weight and even the sound it makes. Unsurprisingly the list reaches back into history, and if the oldest actual term loor (and its synonyms lowrie and lurries) come from the 14th century French lower meaning revenue or wages, and the old Romany lowe to plunder, other terms echo the coins of the Roman empire. Bull (a crown or five shillings [25p]) and hog (one shilling [5p]) recall the designs on two small Roman coins. Dibs or dibbs comes probably from the diobolus, a Roman coin worth tuppence halfpenny, although claims have been made for dibstones, a Scottish children's gambling game involving sheep bones. Somewhat later come other antiquarian terms: tester (6d [2.5p]), also known as a tizzy came from teston, the French name of a silver coin struck at Milan by Duke Galeazzo Sforza (1468-76). It had his own head on it, as did similar testons coined

by Louis XII (1498-1515) and his successor François I (1515-47) of France and by Henry VIII (1509-47) of England. A 19C usage was simply the Queen's pictures. Likewise winn meant a penny to the subjects of Henry's daughter. Elizabeth I. From winn comes the mid-19C rhyming slang nose and chin. The otherwise daunting simoleon is possibly a blend of simon, a dollar, and the French napoleon, worth 20 francs. Dimmock (18C) stems from dime, either in its early (14C) meaning of 'tenth' or 'tithe', or more simply from the US dime (ten cents), first minted in 1785. Most fundamental of all is peck coming from the Latin pecunia, meaning money (itself derived from pecus meaning flock), although it is arguable that this peck\* reflects the more recent slang for food.

The concept of money as the commodity without which life is impossible, is found in the actual (the basis of bearable existence), the needful, the wherewith, coal or cole (the concrete and metaphorical fuel of daily life), coliander (or coriander and thus seed), corks and ballast (which help you stay 'afloat' and 'on an even keel'), feathers (with which one 'feathers one's nest'), and plain stuff and old (possibly an abbreviation of old stuff). Quid (1668), meaning first sovereign and latterly pound sterling, comes possibly from the Latin meaning 'what', with 'one needs' as an unspoken suffix. Scramble, bustle (1810) and more recently scratch (1930) carry the feeling of the struggle for existence. Rowdy may perhaps be added to this group; a popular term c. 1841, Thackeray used it to create his fictitious bankers: 'Rowdy and Stump', a firm who can also be found in Cuthbert Bede's Adventures of Mr Verdant Green in 1853. The more recent dosh may come from a mix of dollars and cash, but a more likely root is in doss\*, a place to sleep, and thus the wherewithal for purchasing it.

More metaphors come with **brads** (1812, probably taken from the name of small rivets/nails used by shoemakers and giving the phrase **tip the brads**: to be generous and thus a gentleman), **rivets** (which 'hold life together') and **horse nails**. Similarly **sugar** sweetens life, and **scad**, an abbreviation of *scads*, means abundance or plenty, as does the biblical **corn in Egypt** (*Genesis* xlii.1). **Bread** the hippie standby (fr. the Yiddish *broyt*), is of course the staff of life, and comes with such synonyms as today's Afro-American **cake** and

the older dough (with its rhy. sl. cousin cods as in cod's roe, and the punning do-re-mi). Tack\*, also meaning food, is another variation, as is the Australian motsa (presumably from the Hebrew matze, a piece of unleavened bread which often comes in a large, circular 'biscuit' and can be seen as resembling a huge coin). While Sigmund Freud would make the money/excrement link, the slang coiners were there already with muck, dust (although this may have been an abbreviation of gold dust) and the unequivocal crap. The negative aspects of money are further underlined in darby, from the name of a particularly severe usurer's bond - Father Darby's Bands - which in the 16C effectively bound the borrower to the lender while the debt remained outstanding. Debts also enter the obscure legem pone. This term comes from the first two words of the fifth division of Psalm cxix, which begins the psalms at Matins on the 25th day of the month; associated with March 25th (the year's first quarter day and thus the first major payday of the calendar), they became used to mean the payment of money, or more peremptorily: cash down.

Passing to the concrete images, as well as the sound, giving the onomatopoeic chink, jink, chinkers, jingleboy (a pound) and crackle (of notes), the colour of money has created many slang terms. The term greenback followed hard on the creation of the dollar bill by President Lincoln, and similar terms include green, greenies, both long and lean green, and a number of vegetables such as kale, lettuce and cabbage, although this latter predates its US use: for 17C London tailors it meant pieces of material filched from a job and sold for a profit. As such it is reminiscent of bunce or bunts, the coster term for second-rate apples which were sold off cheap or even given away to market boys, who could in turn sell them at a small profit. Similar terms include pudding and jam, while other trades had their own variations on the theme: skewings (gilders), cabbage (tailors), blue pigeon (plumbers; from the slang for lead), fluff (railway clerks, meaning simply 'short change'); station offices also enjoyed manablins or menavelins, odd money in the daily accounts, which probably came from the nautical manavel, meaning to pilfer.

Licit or illicit perks are also implicit in gravy, Damon Runyon's 'Guys and Dolls' opt for another vegetable: potatoes, while their latterday descendents prefer moolah. Spondulics, much beloved of 20C fictional gangsters and private eyes, may derive from a vulgarisation of greenbacks, although more feasible is a link to the Greek spondulikos the adjectival form of spondulox. a type of shell used as early 'money' and in turn similar to wampum, taken from the Algonquin wampumpeag: beads made from quahog shells and used as money. The otherwise unclassifiable wonga plus womba and wanga, monetary buzzwords of the 1980s, may be descendents of wampum. Still in the world of nature, clam means a dollar bill, while rhino, dating from 1688, defies etymology; the idea that it refers to the rhinoceros, then a fabulous creature 'worth its weight in gold', implies a certain lexicographical desperation.

Other generalities include **stumpy** (what one 'stumps up'), **tow** (because, claim some, like tow, one burns it so fast), **moss** (none of which is gathered by a rolling stone, although an earlier use means roof lead, which, when stolen, was worth money), and **wad** (coined in the late 19C and enshrined in contemporary comedian Harry Enfield's character 'Loadsamoney,' with his Thatcherite credo; 'Wad is God'). **Mint**, SE for the 'money factory', was the slangy term for money itself from the 16-19C, and produced such variations as **mint sauce** and, in America **mint drops**. **Ribbin**, **ribbon**, and **ribband** all carry overtones of the richness of ribbon-bedecked packages, and the phrase 'the ribbin runs thick (or thin)' implies the availability or otherwise of cash.

Ducats (plus duckies in America), shekels, dollars, guineas and coin (fr. which comes the recent carn) all reflect the 'legitimate' coinage of those names, while deaner and dinarly stem from dinero (fr. Parlyaree). Parlyaree also produces ponte and poona (both from pondo: a pound), caroon (five shillings or a crown), madza caroon (2/6 or half a crown), dacha-saltee (10d or dieci soldi; in Italy one soldo was worth one-twentieth of a lira), and cinqua soldi (fivepence). Rhyming slang produces oscar (Oscar Asche: cash), sausage and mash, bees and honey (money), and whistle and toot (loot) while the rarer backslang has yennom (money) and yennop (penny).

The criminal aspects of money offer the barefaced loot, soap and palm oil (wherewith palms are greased), and boodle, much beloved of the late Leslie Charteris' swashbuckling 'Saint' and coming either from the Dutch boedel meaning household effects, and thus one's personal estate; or from the Scottish bodle, a small coin worth two Scots pence or one sixth of an English one and as such usually glossed as 'worthless'; it is in the US that the modern meaning, whether of criminal or political graft, has developed. Less criminous is beans, which comes from the French biens, another term for wordly goods. Shot, hence the phrase the 'whole bang shoot', originates in the 15th century as does the contrived sinews of war, a term used by Francis Bacon, himself quoting the writer Mucianus, who declared that, 'Moneys are the sinews of war'.

Paper money has been known variously as flimsy, soft money (still current in America), a bit of stiff, the folding stuff and rags; money orders are still known as paper, while a large denomination note was a long tailed 'un. The signatures of various secretaries to the Treasury, which appear on the notes, led to eponymous coinages, notably the Bradbury (Sir John Bradbury, secretary c.1915; cf. brads), and the Fisher (Sir Warren Fisher c.1919-1933). Coincident was the more contemporary Archer, the disputed sum of £2,000 which formed the basis of the libel case in which the popular writer Jeffrey Archer was involved. The scrope, not a note, but a farthing, recognised another secretary, Sir John Scrope, in office from 1724-52. A cheque is a kite, especially when it is scheduled to 'bounce' or otherwise 'fly'. A bad cheque is a stumer, taken from racing use. In America, during the financial panic of 1837, and later during the Civil War of 1861-5, low denomination coins were withdrawn from circulation: in their place came the shinplasters, cheques of between three and fifty cents. Reluctantly accepted, they were rarely redeemed.

But banknotes are a relatively recent invention. Until the 19C coins were the norm, and their colour has created a number of terms. Gold gives gilt, goree and Old Mr Gory (both from Fort Goree, on the Gold Coast), ochre, red 'un, redge and ridge (1665), gingerbread (1690), gelt (Yiddish), delog (backslang) and gold itself. The golden guinea (replaced in 1813 by the sovereign

and passing on to it a number of names) was particularly productive: yellow hammer, yellow boys, canaries and goldfinch. Marigold covered any golden coin, although it also denotes the specific sum of one million pounds. Blunt (1812), possibly comes from the French blond meaning yellow, but it make just as well stem from the blunt edge of unmilled coins, or from Mr John Blunt, chief architect of the South Sea Bubble scandal. Glistener, shiner, harlequin and rainbow all attested to the metal's visual allure. The long-obsolete seven shilling coin was a spangle. Iron (1780) had faded by 1840, but brass has been in use since the 16C.

Silver, in turn, has its derivations: **gent** (fr. *argent*), **tin** and **tinie**, **teaspoons** and **wedge** (meaning silver in 1725 and revived, meaning money in general, by among others *Minder's* 'Arthur Daley'). The **family plate** is self-evident. Copper coins offer the obvious **coppers**, as well as **pewter**. **Brown** means halfpenny and **lolly** stems possibly from the rhy. sl. **lollipop** = cop = copper.

Cash in general, rather than credit, gives the ready (17C), or readies, along with ready John, ready gilt and similar combinations, while the Yiddish mazuma comes the Hebrew: prepared or ready. Immigrants to London's East End also created oof and ooftish meaning money and rich; hence P. G. Wodehouse's Drone Alexander 'Oofy' Prosser, with the secondary pun on prosser: a cadger or idler; it comes from the German auf tische or 'on the table'. The term originated c.1850 and, according to the Sporting Times 'the aristocracy of Houndsditch, being in the habit of refusing to play cards, unless the money were "on the table".' Allied terms are oofless (poor) and the feathered oof-bird (money in plenty). Another foreign coinage is hoot, from the Maori utu, meaning money. Ackers stems from the British Army's World War II travails in North Africa, where the Egyptian word akka means one piastre.

## SPECIFIC SUMS

As well as the million-pound marigold (see above), other large sums have attracted their own name: £100,000 is a plum or plumb; one thousand, whether dollars or pounds, is a cow, a grand or G, a gorilla (a big monkey, qv) or, most recently, a K

(fr. kilo). Five hundred pounds is a monkey, one hundred a century, ton, big one, C, C-note, hun, one bill, or a yard; two hundred pounds a twoer; one hundred and fifty dollars a buck-or a yard-and-a-half and fifty dollars is half a yard; twenty-five pounds is a pony or, in rhy. sl. a macaroni. More recently unspecified, but notably large sums have been termed big bucks, megabucks, a bundle, a packet, a pile and telephone numbers. Those hoping to impress carry the fraudulent, if gaudy flash roll or California roll, which, whether in the 18th or 20th century mean the same thing: a high denomination note wrapped ostentatiously around a bundle of far lesser currency. Diminutive sums can be dismissed as hay, chickenfeed, peanuts and razoo, an Australian term usually found in 'not a brass razoo' and possibly stemming from rags (see pelow).

Twenty dollars is a double sawbuck or double sawski, while twenty pounds is a score; ten pounds is a double-finnup, a long-tailed finnup, or a tenner; rhy. sl. gives a cock and hen or cockle and hen; ten dollars a sawbuck or a sawski. Five pounds offers an Abraham, from Araham Newland (chief cashier of Bank of England 1778–1807) or a Marshall (chief cashier c.1870), a fin, finnup, finnif or pinnif (all from the Yiddish / German funf: five), a fiver, a flimsy, a horse, and a lil (fr. the Romany word for book). From rhyming slang come half a cock (half a cock and hen: half of ten), and jacks (jack's alive: five). Across the Atlantic five dollars can be a pound note, reflecting a more generous exchange rate.

As well as the many references to colour the pound, the sovereign, and before them the golden guinea (£1.1.0) have numerous slang nicknames: quid, thick 'un (though this also meant a 5/-), a bar, oncer, nicker, note, smacker and smackeroo (supposedly from the smack of money hitting a counter or table) and sov. Also bean, bleeder (a racing use, and presumably referring to the haemorrhaging of cash on horses), chip, couter (fr. the Romany kotor guinea), foont, funt (fr. Yiddish: a pound), gingleboy (onomatopoeic), Jimmy or Jemmy O'Goblin (1850, rhy. sl.) and doonup (backsl.), Jack, James, Jane, job, meg (although mag: halfpenny, as well as the tip expected by Scottish servants), and mousetrap (c1875, from the supposed resemblance of the coin's engraved

crown and shield to a set mousetrap). Portcullis referred to the design on the 17C silver halfpenny. The monarch's head gave ned (1750), neddy and nob (all meaning head), monarch and portrait. Less obvious are a new hat (1876, from the cost?), a remedy (18C, from SE remedy, the permissable variation in coins' weight), skin (originally meaning purse), skiv, stranger (mainly tramps' and referring to the rarity of owning such a sum) and strike (originally meaning to borrow). The pictures on the coins also give the horse sovereign (1870, a coin decorated with Pistrucci's effigies of St George and the Dragon) and the dragon.

Ten shillings, now fifty pence, offers the logical half bean, half couter, half Jack, James or Jane, half ned, half a bar and half a sheet, net-gen, and smelt, as well as rhyming slang's calf (half), and cows (cow's calf: half).

The five piece or crown was either a bull or bull's eye (17C, see above), a cartwheel, hind coach-wheel, or wheel (fr. its shape and size), decus (c.1780), from the Latin motto decus et tutamen: 'an ornament and a safeguard', from Virgil Aenied V and originally describing a breast-plate, subsequently engraved on coins (where it referred both to the inscription and to its helping prevent their being clipped) and which has reappeared on the English version of the modern pound coin, or an Oxford (c.1870, rhy. sl.: Oxford scholar = dollar = 5/-); a counterfeit crown was a case or caser (possibly from the Yiddish chaserei: rubbish).

As terms for ten shillings echoed those for a pound or sovereign, so do those for 2/6, the defunct half-crown, follow those of the crown. Thus one finds the fore coachwheel (the smaller of the two pairs), the half case, half dollar, half Oxford and the backslang formations flatch (1851, half) and half yenork. Other terms include the five-pot piece (a 19C medical students' term referring to the price of a pot [quart] of half and half), a George (fr. the King's head), a slat (fr. slate: sheet, used by market traders till 1970s), a posh korona (fr. the Romany posh: half, thus posh horri: a halfpenny), and a tusheroon or tosheroon (1859, both from the Parlyaree madza caroon: half crown). This latter is still used by Afro-Americans to mean a dollar bill.

The rhy. sl. Abraham's willing, and rogue and villain mean shilling, as do blow, bob (c.1780), bobstick (possibly the origin of bob, it certainly means a shilling's worth, but defies further elucidation), borde (possibly fr. bord: shield), and breakyleg. Touch my nob rhymes with bob. The colour of a shilling gives the lillywhite groat, the beong (1850, from Parlyaree bianco = white = a silver coin), and the gen (1851, presumably from argent: silver, although some claim an abbreviation of generalise, a somewhat tortured backslang formation of shilling). Other terms include grunter (c.1775) and hog (see above), jogue (market traders'), levy (possibly an abbreviation of eleven), a Brummagem button and a Manchester sovereign (both implying cheapness and possible counterfeiting), mejoge and midjic (direct thefts of the Shelta term for shilling), a oner, a peg (either directly from Scottish dialect meaning shilling or from the Yorkshire word meaning blow, itself a slang term for shilling), teviss (1859, a backsl. form of the small Dutch coin the stiver), a twelver and a thirteener, touch-me (rhy. sl.: touch me on the nob: bob), shigs and chips.

The thin silver sixpence was easily bent, and thus named variously bandy, bender, cripple, croaker, crook and crookback. More popular, and longest lasting until decimalization saw it off was tanner (1811), stemming either from the Romany tawno, meaning small or from a ponderous Biblical joke about St Peter's supposed banking transaction when he 'lodged with one Simon a tanner'. This same tale offers simon. Rhyming slang for tanner has variously goddess Diana, lord of the manor, susy (Susy Anna), and kick (six), while Parlyaree has deaner and downer (see above). Other terms include half borde, half hog and kye (although see 1/6 below) and the porcine grunter, hog, pig and sow's baby. The number six gives sice (six on a dice) and its derivative syebuck. The size of the coin creates sprat and fiddle (1750, from fiddler's money, which also meant small change, itself otherwise known as grocery). A tilbury (1780) represented the fare charged by the trans-Thames ferry from Gravesend to Tilbury Fort.

Rhyming slang gives abergavenny: penny, while backslang has yennop; with them come d (fr. the Roman denarius), George, harper (an Irish brass coin with a harp on it), saltee (fr. soldi), win

or winn (1567), and debblish (fr. South Africa). Counterfeit pennies were known as pollards, from the coiner who made them during the reign of Edward I.

The colour of the halfpenny gives brown and the rhy. sl. camden town; flatch (meaning half), madza saltee (1850, Parlyaree for half soldi); magpie, magg (1781), make and mec all denote the legitimate coin, while Maggie Rab or Robbie is Scots for counterfeit. Other terms include scurrick (fr. scuddick: a tiny sum, which in turn stems from the dialect scud: a wisp of straw), tonic (which comes from tanner, despite its meaning of sixpence), and rap (thus giving the phrase 'I don't care a rap').

The long-dead farthing, the smallest of all but once a coin of some real purchasing power, gives farden, and thus the rhy. sl. Covent Garden; fadge, fiddle\*, gennitraf (backsl.), gig, grig, quartereen, jack (17C), jigg, mopus (supposedly from Sir Giles Mompesson, a notoriously corrupt merchant of the reign of King James I) and rag (both these later essentially meaning very small sum). Harrington comes from Lord Harrington who in 1613 obtained patent for minting them.

Finally come a selection of sums rather than actual denominations

of money. Six shillings and sixpence was a George (fr. the old mark, worth 6/8); five and three was a whore's curse (c.1750), a telling off one received for using it: a gold coin, it was substituted for the pricier half guinea by mean customers who liked to be seen giving the girl gold, but saw no reason to be over-generous. 1/6 or eighteen pence was a hog and a kye, although kye itself, allegedly stemming from a Yiddish term meaning eighteen, could also serve. A hangman's wages was one and one penny-halfpenny, the equivalent of a Scots mark and instituted as the executioner's fee by James I; it was later known as a loonslatt, possibly from the combination loon, meaning a a worthless or boorish person, and slat (2/6). Still north of the border, a ride, bearing the image of a man on horseback, was a golden coin issued by James VI, tenpence was a jumper, while five pence was a kid's eye. Ninepence was a picture of ill-luck - for not being the whole shilling - and fourpence (the groat) a flag, a castle rag (rhy. sl.) or a joey (fr. the economist Joseph Hume [1777-1855] and coined by London

cabbies). A threepenny bit was threps (17C), threeswins, thrums, thrumbuskins (c.1775), thrummup and the rhyming currants and plums. Twopence was a deuce, duce, or dace.

# CLOTHING

### **GENERAL TERMS**

The oldest slang term for clothing is also one of most resilient: togs dates back to the 14C Morte Arthure (later used as the basis for Malory's epic), where it appears in the line 'Alle with taghte mene and towne in togers flle ryche'; by the 16C it is cited by Harman as meaning coat or cloak, albeit in the synonymous form togman or togemans. All these terms are rooted in the Latin toga, which also gives the Etonian tug, a scholar, and thus one who wears a gown. Harman also has dudde (15C), a coarse cloak, which, as duds, is still in regular use, although the phrase to sweat duds: to pawn one's clothes, has long since vanished. The 17C brings another stayer, rags, which produced a number of combinations: tag-rag: villainous and poor, now transposed to rag-tag (and bobtail); rag-mannered: very vulgar; raggery: women's clothes; the ragtrade: tailoring, rag-stabber: a tailor and rag-tacker: a dressmaker; a rag-sooker was thief's custom-built instrument used to hook clothes from washing lines or shop-windows; rags and jags are tatters while to have two shirts and a rag is to be comfortably off; to tip one's rags a gallop is to leave; to get one's rags out and the later lose one's rag both mean to lose one's temper; to rag out is to dress up and to show the white rag is to surrender or act in a cowardly manner. The 20C ragtop is a convertible motorcar. Rig (19C) comes from a ship's rigging, in which it is 'dressed', while the nautical background also informs dunnage (19C), in its SE form the matting or brushwood used to pack cargo, and slops (19C), which initially referred to a sailor's ready-made clothing, but which could be used in a civilian context too; clobber

(19C) comes from Yiddish and **traps** (19C) abbreviates trappings: one's personal effects.

Doodads (20C) is synonymous with the unspecified thingumibob; but probably has some links to duds; drapes began life with the drape jacket, a garment much beloved of the 1950s' Teddy boys. The 1990s' grunge (fr. grungy: filthy, dirty, unpleasant) reflects a more recent teen style. Schmutter comes from Yiddish, which it turn draws on the Polish szamata: a piece of cloth; threads (originally US) and wrapping (especially of women) should make themselves clear. Afro-Americans, who contribute a number of clothing-related terms, have piece, especially as in leather piece -a leather coat or jacket - and fronts, which is possibly linked to the show business jargon front: a large diamond tiepin or ring worn by vaudevillians to indicate prosperity. Clear cut clothes are stylish while in criminal circles night-clothes (punning on the SE use) are dark clothes used for night-time robbery. Stylish outfits are variously one's best bib and tucker (fr. 18C Lancs. dial.), glad rags (US c.1900, then UK), go to meeting clothes and go to meeting bags (the 'meeting' is Sunday church, especially of a non-conformist faith) and the Afro-American silks. Old clothes are grubbies or tat (fr. 19C tat: a rag; thus tatter: a rag-gatherer); second-hand clothes are Monmouth Street finery (Monmouth Street was the centre of the 19C old clothes trade; Dickens termed it 'the burial place of fashion') and hand-me-downs (passed on from another owner); ready-made clothes are reach-me-downs (perhaps from the phrase, 'Reach me down one from the rack'?).

## **GETTING DRESSED**

To dress is to get togged up, to pile into (one's clothes), to get dolled up or to get dolled up like a barber's cat. To dress up is to put on dog (19C, from doggy: stylish), to dike down (20C), look sharp, spiff (oneself) up, tart (oneself) up, and tog (oneself) up. Those who are thus dressed up can be described as (in their) best bib and tucker, dap (fr. dapper), dressed to death or dressed to within an inch of one's life (19C), dressed to the nines (fr. the importance of the number nine in numerology),

dressed up to the knocker (fr. 17C knocker: one of striking appearance, and thus a knock-out), dressed up like a dog's dinner (20C), dressed up like a pox doctor's clerk (20C, Aus.), dressed like Christmas beef (19C); to be dressed up like a sore finger (Aus.) is to be too elaborately dressed. Even greater ostentation is seen in the Aus. flash as a rat with a gold tooth.

Dressed up can be dolled up, dyked down, flossed up (of a woman), the full buf (20C, from beautiful, or beautiful fellow), in full fig (19C, possibly from figure), got up (19C), kitted up (20C), piss elegant (20C) and pooned or pooned up (Aus., fr. ponce? or fr. poon\*: a fool) both carrying an air of flashiness, spiffed or spiffed up (19C, fr. spiff: well-dressed), and togged to the bricks. Afro-American terms (all 20C) include buttered, choked down, fonked out heavy and fonky to the bone (to the bone: more than simply skin-deep), laid out and laid to the bone, mod to the bone (in the US sense of mod: modern, not the UK Mod: a 1960s' teen cult), pressed, pimped down, ragged down heavy and ragged to the bone (both from rag\*), silked to the bone, suited down and tabbed or tabbed to the bone (possibly fr. tab: a label). To be smart is to be clean or clean to the bone (AA), neat or nifty.

## UNDERWEAR

Terms for underwear include frillery (19C), ham-bags (19C, from SE hams: a thigh, and referring to women's drawers; thus the early 20C ham-frills: female running shorts). Proper names give Alan Whickers (20C, rhy.sl.: knickers; from the broadcaster), the US BVDs (fr. the clothiers Bradley, Voorhies & Day, specialists in men's underwear), and the Aus. Harolds (rhy. sl.?). More rhy. sl. terms include east and west (vest) and fleas and ants (pants). Skivvies (US) are either vests or pants; didies come from diddy: little, thus 'smalls'; UBs (US 20C) are 'underbodies', kecks a Liverpudlian version of kicksies\* and snuggies (US) from SE snug: comfortable, warm. Falsies are false or padded breasts and the VPL is a visible pantie line, as seen through tight trousers or skirts. Long johns or John Ls commemorate the boxing champion John

L Sullivan who wore heavy tights as part of his old-style boxing gear. Finally passion killers, any form of voluminous, heavy female underwear, emerged during World War II when they were coined to describe Army-issue women's knickers; parallel terms included blackouts: WAAF winter-weight knickers, which were dark blue and twilights, the summer weight, which were light blue. Very tight underpants were like Edgeware Road (20C), because 'that's got no ballroom either'; or, in Australia, like St Paul's (possibly because 'there's no standing room inside').

#### **TROUSERS**

The earliest recorded slang term for trousers, or breeches as such garments would remain until the early 19C (although the word itself appears during the 17C) is kicks (17C). Like its 18C successor kicksies the term moved, as did the garment, from meaning breeches to trousers during the 19C. Thus an East End tailor (quoted by Mayhew) could advertise himself as a 'Slap-up Tog and out-and-out Kicksies Builder' and offer 'Ready Gilt - Tick being no go' 'Upper Benjamins\*, built on a downey plan, a monarch to half a finuff\*. Slap up Velveteen togs\*, lined with the same... A pair of Kerseymere Kicksies, any colour, built very slap up, with the artful dodge, a canary...Pair of out-and-out fancy Kicksies, cut to drop down on the trotters\*, 2 bulls.' Both terms are still used, although another 17C coinage, farting crackers has totally disappeared. The 18C introduced hams and ham-cases (both fr. the Romany hamyas: knee breeches), plus the defunct dittoes (originally tailors' jargon for a suit of which both jacket and breeches were made of the same material, still a relative rarity at the time.

Stereotypes of supposed Victorian prudery abound, and many disappear under proper inspection, but the apparent terror of naming such intimate items as trousers is certainly born out in slang. Such coy euphemisms include inexpressibles, inexplicables, indescribables and indispensables (the first three of which appear in Dickens' Sketches by Boz [1836]) plus unmentionables, untalkaboutables, mustn't mention 'ems and unutterables. Continuations (which 'continue' the waistcoat) paralleled the SE

term, which meant gaiters: continuing the knee breeches and similarly spared adult blushes, as did abridgements although this latter seems to have achieved but a single nonce appearance, in Bulwer Lytton's play Money (1840). Yet for all this linguistic circumspection, the Victorians could be as blunt, even coarse, as anyone. Arse-rugs, bumbags (used for swimming trunks in the 20C) and bags (thus howling bags: trousers whose lurid patterns 'howl'), sit-upons, sit-down-upons and whistling breeches (corduroys, from the sound the material makes as one walks) make no compromises. Further 19C terms include drumstick cases, rice bags (19C, a play on arse?), trolly-wags (abbreviated to the simple trollies in the 20C), mary walkers (US, after one Dr Mary Walker, notorious for dressing in Turkish trousers), rank and riches (rhy. sl.: breeches), upper stock (breeches), and trucks (possibly fr. trolly-wags). Skilts (briefly fashionable at the midcentury) were a mix of a kilt and a prototype Oxford bag: short, reaching only just below the knee, they were quite voluminous, being a fully 18 inches broad at the bottom. Gallyslopes were the 19C's development of galligaskins (16C), a pair of wide breeches, subsequently leggings or gaiters; the term comes from a corruption of the 16C French garguesque, which in turn played on the Italian grechesco: Greek; such garments were supposedly 'in the Greek fashion'. Tight trousers were eel-skins.

The 20C has the rhyming slang council houses, petrols (Aus. petrol bowsers), and round the houses, plus strides (originally theatrical, now mainly Aus.) and trou (US). Teen fashions have drainpipes (1950s, very narrow), flares (fr. flared trousers, first fashionable c.1972), loon pants or loons (extreme flares) and baggies (US, shorts worn for surfing); daks comes from the proprietary name for a make of clothes, especially men's trousers with a self-supporting waistband, patented by the London clothiers Simpson's in 1933.

## COAT OR JACKET

Aside from togman, togeman or togmans (see togs\*) Harman cites caster as meaning cloak; while 17C sources give mish-top-

per (which goes or 'tops' a mish\*: a shirt) and vinegar (which was to be worn, perhaps, in 'sharp' weather); the 18C wrap-rascal applied to red cloaks only. Adopting its non-squeamish mode the 19C has bum-freezer, bum-shaver, bum-perisher, bum-curtain, bum-cooler, arsehole perisher and arsehole shaver, all of which meant a short jacket. The opposite fashion extreme is found in immensikof, a term coined to describe a bulky, fur-lined overcoat by the music hall star Arthur Lloyd, who called himself Immensikoff and appeared on stage in such a coat to sing, c.1868, his hit 'The Shoreditch Toff'. Other coats included the joseph (fr. the Biblical 'coat of many colours'), and its equally scriptural successor, the benjamin, upper benjamin or ben, still extant as the 20C benny. The shift, according to John Camden Hotten, was in tribute to the large number of London tailors called Benjamin. Similar was upper tog (fr. togs\*), while a lily benjamin was a large white coat and a little benjamin a waistcoat. Isle of fling might, at a stretch, be rhyming slang for lining, trusty implies the wearer's faith in his coat, the upper shell and under shell were respectively overcoat and waistcoat, a body-cover did just that and capella was a direct adoption of the Italian. This in turn drew on the Latin cappella: little cloak or cape, and comes from the cappella or cloak of St. Martin, preserved by the Frankish kings as a sacred relic, carried into battle, and used to give sanctity to oaths; thus the name was applied to the sanctuary in which the relic was preserved under the care of its appellani (chaplains), and thence to any sanctuary containing holy relics and thus to any place used for worship, other than a church, the earlier name for which was oratorium: the oratory.

Cover-me-decent (1800) and cover-me-decently (1825) meant coat; thus cover-me-properly was a smart garment and cover-me-queerly a ragged one; the claw hammer, swallow tail and sparrow-tail all referred to the tailcoat of full evening dress, which their shapes supposedly resembled; the MB coat was a long coat worn by clergymen – MB meant 'mark of the beast' and referred to Popery; pygostole was used by churchmen, the Greek word meant literally rump-stole and another Greek term, panu-petaston, served at Oxford University to describe a loose,

widesleeved overcoat; **rock-a-low** anglicised the French *roquelaure*: overcoat and a **reliever** was an old coat that could be shared by a group of workmen.

Rhyming slang offers steam packet (19C, jacket); I'm afloat, bucket afloat and bucket and float (all 19C, coat), weasel (20C, weasel and stoat) and nanny goat (20C). Other recent terms are benny (fr. benjamin\*), the Afro-American boolhipper and leather piece (both meaning leather coat), smother (possibly from the Yiddish-based schmutter\*; it also describes the pick-pocket's coat, draped over his arm to mask his movements), rod, pussy (a fur coat) and a monkey jacket (Royal Navy: an officer's reefer coat; the monkey possibly refers to an organ grinder's monkey, bedecked in some miniscule jacket).

#### **BOOTS AND SHOES**

The SE hocks, referring to a horse's leg, gives hock-dockies (18C), an early term for shoes while the farmyard further underpins carts, a 19C term that supposedly echoes a labourer's heavy, boot-clad step, although an alternative source may be the Norfolk dial. cart: the top half of a crab's shell, which a boot can be seen as resembling. Rhyming slang has daisy roots (19C, boots) and howd'ye dos (19C, shoes). The beetle-crusher (19C) began life meaning simply a foot; by the end of the century it had become the boot that covers it; the 20C has roach-killer (fr. US roach: cockroach). Trotter-cases and trotter-boxes (19C) come from trotter: a foot; bankers (19C) are heavy, while excruciators (19C) are very tight and pointed, forerunners of the 20C winkle-pickers.

The 20C adds boppers, bovver boots and cherry reds (as worn by skinheads or bovver boys) and Doc Martens (originally skinhead footwear too, but now a wide-ranging fashion staple), brothel creepers and brothel-stompers (thick-soled, suede-topped shoes, an essential part of the Teddy Boy/rocker uniform), reptiles (anything made of reptile skin) and, echoing the earlier beetle-crushers, stomps, stompers, shit stompers and waffle-stompers (fr. the pattern on the sole which resembles the criss-crossing of a waffle iron).

A potato (19C) is a hole in one's sock while air hose is a US term for the wearing of shoes without socks. Wellies are wellington boots (thus the exhortation: 'Give it some welly', meaning give it a hefty wellington-clad kick: put in some effort) and a thousand eyes (AA) is a heavily perforated leather shoe. Boots and shoes aside, the primary contemporary footwear, especially among the slang-using young, is the running shoe or trainer. The UK has used daps to mean gymshoes since the 19C (the original term was used by the army to mean slippers), but all other terms are US. Chucks and cons both refer to Chuck Taylor's brand of Converse basketball boots; airs come from the Nike 'Air Jordan' model that was particularly prized c.1990 and is named for basketball superstar Michael Jordan, while quick starts and felony shoes refer to any brand of these high-priced, high-fashion trainers. Both terms are implicitly racist, suggesting that the black teenagers who particularly favour such footwear are de facto up to no good.

#### **HATS**

Living in an era when the hat, other than the ubiquitous, logo-be-decked baseball cap (a **gimme cap** in the US), is essentially invisible as a fashion item, it is perhaps hard to appreciate how essential was such headgear up to a century and less ago.

Nabchet or nab chete, literally a head (nab\*) thing (cheat or chete) is cited in Harman's Caveat while plain nab, plus nap or napper all mean hat as well as head by the 17C. Shappo, thus spelt, borrowed from the French chapeau: a hat. General 19C terms include cady or kadi (mid 19C, possibly fr. Romany stadi: a hat), golgotha (fr. the Greek meaning the place of skulls, and as such central to Christian mythology), a pantile (properly a tile shaped in an ogee shape, one curve being larger than the other, but in this context simply a roofing tile), its abbreviation tile and the rhy. sl. battle of the nile. Rhyming slang also gives lean and fat and the 20C titfer (tit-for-tat: hat). Pimple-cover and upper crust could both also mean the head, while truck referred to the nautical truck, mounted on top, or at the head of a mast. Goss was an

abbreviation for a gossamer hat, fashionable c.1830, and costing four shillings and ninepence, thus giving a four and nine.

Low crowned hats included the smouch, the billycock (with its wide brim; thus the billycock gang: the clergy) and the chummy (this hat was particularly comfortable and thus seen as chummy, or friendly to the wearer). The wide-awake, a soft felt hat with broad brim and low crown, was punningly so named because it lacked a 'nap'. Other hats were the pill-box (coined for the late 19C soldier's small round flat cap) and the muffin-cap (equally small and round and resembling the foodstuff), the mudge and mush-room (low-crowned circular hats worn by women) the digger's delight (Aus.), and the Jerry or Tom and Jerry (a hard round hat). The Muller was named after one Franz Muller, who was hanged in November 1864 for his murder of Thomas Briggs, chief clerk at a London bank. Muller, the first railway murder, had attempted to avoid detection by cutting an inch off his hat. The subterfuge failed, but for a while the fashion did flourish.

Among those that qualify as high or top hats are the chimney, chimney pot, pot (20C:a bowler), wee-jee (originally a chimney pot), or stove pipe, the beaver and the castor (17C, originally of beaver fur), the bell topper (UK: worn on horseback; Aus /NZ: any silk hat), a box hat (19C, a tall silk hat), plug-hat (US:a top hat, Aus. a bowler; in both cases the head 'plugs' in to it), a topper and a penthouse-nab (18C, a large hat). A scraper or three-cornered scraper (18C) was a cocked hat, specifically a gold-braided cocked hat as worn in the Royal Navy.

A calp or kelp (18C) was any had considered exotic, the term came from the Turkish calpac a Turkish and Tartar felt cap; a thrum-cap was any form of rough headgear; its SE equivalent meant a rugged, rocky headland swept by waves; both terms are based in thrum: to beat; the cock and pinch was favoured by early 19C dandies: cocked back and front and pinched at the sides, it was made of beaver fur; the fantail (19C) was the sou'wester type hat worn by coalheavers and dustmen and moab (19C, from Psalms 60:8 'Moab is my washpot') was a turban-shaped hat worn by women. A molocher (19C) was a renovated hat, ironed and greased back to something resembling its original condition, and

a sleepless hat was a worn hat which thus had 'no nap' (cf. wideawake). The mitre, washpot (cf. Moab) and colleger were all forms of cap worn at the universities. The 20C offers three 'occupational' hats: the skidlid (motorcycle helmet), the boonie hat (US) a soft military hat for use in the jungle or boondocks), and the steel pot, a steel helmet), plus cunt-hat a felt hat (punning, presumably on 'feel').

## THE SHIRT

Other than the 16C lully which originally meant wet or drying linen, the earliest term for shirt is camesa, stolen directly from the Italian camisa: shirt. Camesa in turn generates commission (17C) and its abbreviation mish (17C) and later smish and shimmy (both 19C). Quite defunct, other than in the market-traders' term milly, are mill-tog, mill-twig, mill-tug and mill-tag (all of which 19C terms come from the Shelta melthog: a shirt). Rhyming slang gives dickey and dicky dirt (19C, dickey originally meaning only a worn out shirt), roll me (in the dirt) and Uncle Bert (20C); fleshbag, carrioncase and intimate (all 19C) imply the garment's proximity to the body, gad adopts a Romany term, shaker originally meant a hand and narp is Scots dialect. A sideboard was a stand-up collar, before taking on its 20C meaning as a sideburn. To have one's shirt out is to show a flag of distress. The small loop that may be found sewn below the collar at the back of the shirt is a fag tag or fruit loop (20C, fag\* and fruit\* both meaning homosexual). The assumption is that such a loop can be grasped by one man while sodomising another.

The final shirt-orientated term is **piccadill**, an ornamented collar fashionable in the early 17C. The term comes from the Spanish *picadillo*, the diminutive of *picado* meaning pricked, pierced, punctured, slashed or minced (thus *picada*: a puncture and *picadillo*: minced meat). The piccadill was brought to England either by Robert Baker (*The London Encyclopedia*, 1983) or by 'one Higgins' (*The Atheneum*, 1901); whatever the name the individual in question made a fortune from his import, sufficient to buy land around what is now Piccadilly Circus and to erect, c. 1622 a large mansion which

was promptly, and irreverently christened Piccadilly Hall. The surrounding area soon became known as Piccadilly. While this version is that generally accepted, the OED cites a source writing in 1656 who claimed that the house was thus named because, being at the furthest edge of the parish of St Martin in the Fields, in which it lay, was therefore serving as a 'collar', or outer edge of the area.

## **POCKETS**

Boung or bung (16C, fr. Frisian pung: purse) meant purse, and by extension the pocket in which it was kept; so too did cly (17C) which added an extra definition: a pickpocket, one who extracts the money from its container; roger (17C) originally meant a suitcase. The 19C skin, poke, poge and pogue were all synonymous with purse, while haddock (19C) otherwise meant money. This term comes from the once popular belief that assigned the dark marks on the shoulders of a haddock to the impression left by St. Peter's finger and thumb, when he took the tribute-money out of the fish's mouth at Capernaum. Thus the 16C proverbial phrase: to bring haddock to paddock: to spend or lose everything.

Kick, usually trousers, could mean a pocket, and has survived as such; brigh, possibly from breeks or breeches, gave brighful: a pocketful; peter, otherwise used as safe or any form of receptacle, naturally included pocket among its definitions. Hoxter (19C) was an inside pocket (fr. the Northern dial. oxter. the armpit), pit (19C) was a breast or fob pocket and slash (19C) an outside pocket, fr. slash: a slit in a garment that is designed to reveal the colour of its lining. Sky (19C, sky rocket) is rhy. sl. as is lucy locket (20C); bin (20C) is something into which one dips.

## **SUITS**

Rhyming slang provides piccolo and flute (19C) although the plural piccolos and flutes means boots, and whistle and flute (20C). Vine, totally dated now, was a favoured hipster term for suit in the 1950s, like intimate\* it implied the way in which the garment molded itself to the wearer. Mufti, meaning an military man's off-duty clothes, is virtually SE today, but it began life as

Indian Army slang. According to Hobson-Jobson the term is tied to the religious Musti, the expounder of Islamic law; thus the word 'was perhaps originally applied to the attire of dressing-gown, smoking-cap, and slippers, which was like the Oriental dress of the Musti who was familiar in Europe from his appearance in Moliere's Bourgeois Gentilhomme'. The definition goes on to note that the French equivalent is en Pekin: Peking-style. The military synonym civvies (19C) abbreviates SE civilian clothing, while dog-robbers (20C), the tweed suits a modern officer tends to wear when off-duty, refers to the original definition of dog-robber: an officer's servant (who would not be dressed in uniform) who gained his unflattering nickname from his post-mealtime habit of grabbing any edible leftovers from the mess tables before they could be tossed out to the dogs.

Formal dress, a dinner jacket or a tailcoat, is various a **d.j.** (dinner jacket), a **monkey suit**, **soup and fish** (the preferred term in Wodehouse) and **tails**. The US **tux** was named for Tuxedo Park, N.Y., where the short but still formal jacket was first introduced at the local country club in 1886. It was also, if briefly, known as the **Cowes coat** and the **dress sack**.

A waistcoat can be a charley-prescot (19C, somewhat strained rhy. sl.), a ben or benjie (cf. benjamin\*), a fan or an MB waistcoat (19C, cf. MB coat\*). Braces are either the rhy. sl. airs and graces (20C), stretchers, gallows and galluses (US). These last terms all carry the image of a judicial gallows, on which men rather than trousers are hanged.

## **ACCESSORIES**

As in the 20C, when for a period the gay community, at least, used this accessory to create an elaborate code of sexual preference, the handkerchief played a large part in 19C life. Rather than a square of material upon which one merely blew one's nose, the billy, or silk handkerchief was a central part of costermonger fashion, often apeing that of the prize-ring, where fancy handkerchiefs were an essential trademark of certain fighters. As Mayhew notes, 'The costermonger...prides himself most of all upon his neckerchief and

boots. Men, women, boys and girls all have a passion for these articles. The man who does not wear his silk neckerchief - his "King's-man" as it is called - is known to be in desperate circumstances, the inference being that it has gone to supply the morning's stock money.' The major varieties of billy were the belcher (blue with white or occasionally yellow spots; named for the boxer Jim Belcher, d 1811, whose preferred type it was; since the 19C a belcher can be any spotted handkerchief); the bird's eye wipe or bird's eye fogle (any colour, with eye-like spots); the blood-red fancy (red); the blue billy (blue, with white spots); the cream fancy (white or cream with any pattern); the kingsman (a green base with a yellow pattern; a very gaudy variety is a kingsman of the rortiest, fr. rorty\*: excellent, dashing), the Randal's man (green base with white sports, used by boxer Jack Randal), the water's man or waterman (light or dark blue, from the colours sported by Oxford and Cambridge oarsmen); the yellow fancy (yellow with white spots) and the yellow man (plain yellow).

Other terms include the fogle (fr. the Italian foglia: a pocket, although some claims have been made for the German vogel: a bird, given the bird's eye wipe), lawn (fr. the fabric), bubble duster, madam (because it confers some degree of outward respectability), the rhy. sl. Charlie Lancaster ('handkercher') and the well-known snotrag with its peers the snottinger, snotter and snot-box. Snot itself dates from the 15C and is related to the 12C SE snite (to wipe the nose) and possibly to snout: the nose. Wipe appears in 1700, although nose-wiper and pen-wiper (also the vagina) are both 19C as are stook (probably from the German stück: a piece) and sneezer. Muckender (orig. a swab) is 18C, with its successors muck-rag and mucketer 19C; fam-cloth (literally hand-cloth) is 17C, clout (a cotton handkerchief) 18C; conchclout (fr. conk: nose and clout: cloth), kent (any coloured cotton handkerchief), kent-clout and kent-rag are all 19C.

Gloves are stick-flams (17C, flams is possibly a misreading of fams\*, thus giving 'stick-[to]-hands'), turtle doves (rhy. sl.) and mittens (19C, fr. boxing use); a scarf is a ropper (fr. the Scots roppin: to wrap, and from SE wropper) or a waterfall (19C, it can also mean false hair); a tie is a fourth of July or a Peckham Rye (both rhy.

sl.). Socks are almond rocks (rhy. sl.); a certain type of US socks (black with thin vertical lines) are pimp socks. Spectacles are cheaters (20C, US), Lancashire lasses (rhy.sl. glasses), shades (20C, dark glasses), bossers (19C, from boss-eyed) or barnacles (16C) the earliest term, coming from the 14C barnacle, a form of bit which cruelly pinched the horse's nose, as did these early spectacles. The cane, once so common, could be a whangee, a term which came from the Chinese huang, originally meaning bamboo sprouts that were too old for eating. Thus the whangee was a cane made from the stem of one or other species of Phyllostachys, Chinese and Japanese plants allied to and resembling bamboos. Otherwise it could be a waddy (19C, more of a club than a cane) or a toothpick (an ironic term that similarly described a heavyweight cane, more shillelagh than bamboo). A particular, crutch-handled cane was the crutch, thus giving the term crutch and toothpick brigade: a broad group of stage door johnnies and late 19C men-about-town whose sartorial badges were a crutch and a toothpick (of the dental variety), earning them a music hall rhymester's mock solicitous enquiry 'What about that toothpick, and don't you like that crutch? / And are those trousers very tight, and do they hurt you much?'

A number of term for pocket, above, also meant wallet or purse, typically bung, cly and poke, but other, discrete terms exist, notably dummy (19C), leather (20C) and poggler (20C, from pogue\*). A goitre (20C), is a large roll of money, commonly kept in the trouser pocket. The pocket watch begins to appear c.1600 -Shakespeare mentions them in several plays - and the earliest slang for watch is loge (17C, from the French horloge: watch). Subsequent terms include a warming pan (17C, large and gold and resembling its nickname) and a yack (18C, fr. Welsh yakengeri: a thing for the eyes; yak: eye; yak still has some some use amongst market traders). The 19C has verge, toy and thus red toy (gold), white toy (silver), toy and tackle (a watch and its chain) and toy getter (a watch-snatcher). A white lot or white stuff is a silver watch while a white 'un is a watch and chain; a white jenny is made of foreign silver. Like the warming pan the turnip and the frying pan refer to a heavy, old-fashioned watch, in this case made of silver. The 20C

Gordon and Gotch refers not to a watch-maker, but (bizarrely) to a long-established firm of book importers. Bottle of scotch (19°C) also rhymes with watch, but refers specifically to the cheap Waterbury watches, produced since 1884 in Waterbury, Connecticut. Apart from the various combinations of red (gold) and white (silver) jewellery could be bobbles (19°C, fr baubles; otherwise meaning testicles), jim (possibly from jimmy o'goblin\*, a sovereign) or tom (19°C rhy. sl. tomfoolery: jewellery); diamonds (or any precious stones) are glass, rocks, ice, sparklers and Simple Simon (rhy. sl.). Patacca (20°C) was a direct loan from an Italian slang term, meaning fake, rubbishy jewellery, especially a fake Swiss watch, also known as a mug's ticker or a ramped watch (fr. ramp\*: a swindle).

#### NUDITY

From dress with its varieties to undress with its single preoccupation: nudity. The state of nudity has generated a number of similes, based on naked as... Among them are naked as a stone (14C), naked as a needle (14C), naked as a shorn sheep (17C), naked as a worm (15C), naked as a cuckoo (17C), naked as the cuckoo in Christmas (17C), naked as truth (17C) and naked as my nail (19C) but as Eric Partridge points out, while they may have started life as colloquialisms, they soon became 'SE and proverbial'. Other terms have proved more resilient to absorption into standard speech. Those who are naked have been in the buff since the 17C (fr. buff: bare skin), while the parallel in the nuddy (Aus.), in the raw (US) and in the rude are all 20C. Peeled, based on the 18C verb to peel, is 19C; peel down and peel off (to undress) are 20C. The birthday suit (the birthday being that of Adam and Eve) was coined by Smollett in The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom (1753); Smollett obviously liked his invention: it appears again in Humphrey Clinker (1771). Similar terms are birthday gear, used by Jonathan Swift in 1734 and the much later birthday attire (a single use in 1860). The 18C also uses dishabilly (fr. French en deshabillé: undressed), while the 19C introduces the altogether, an abbreviation of 'altogether naked', and un-

rigged, from rig: clothes. The 20C, inevitably hard-edged, offers bareass, raw and stark bollock naked, a term that despite its use of bollock\*:testicle, can be equally applied to either sex.

Aside from the variations on peel, above, to get undressed is to drop the duds, drop the gear (Aus.) or shuck down (all 20°C). The popular teen prank of lowering one's trousers and offering one's revealed, naked buttocks to the public gaze is variously to drop trou, hambone (Aus.), moon or press ham. To undress someone else is to unrig (19°C), debag or pants (20°C). Finally three phrases for inadvertent undress, or rather semi-dress: charlie's dead (your slip is showing), there's a letter in the post-office (one's shirt tail is out) and it's one o'clock at the water-works (one's trouser-fly is undone).

## **ANIMALS**

The animal kingdom is not particularly well-served by slang, other than as regards horses, which prior to the arrival of the internal combustion engine, played a substantial role in everyday life. Cats and dogs, as pets, offer a small vocabulary, but the horse's main contenders for linguistic variation are lice, that member of the animal kingdom that lived in closest proximity to its human cousins. The farmyard – cattle, pigs, poultry – musters a few more terms, but the vast majority of such words are to be found in now-obsolete local dialects, which are ineligible for inclusion here.

## THE HORSE

The oldest known term for horse is **nag** (15C, there may be links to the Dutch *neg* or *negge*, but the English use is earlier), followed by **prancer** (Harman) and **dobbin** (16C) an ordinary farm horse, though sometimes a broken-down or old one; one of its earliest appearances is in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1596). **Tit** (16C) meant a small horse, often a filly; thus the usage is the basis of tit, meaning woman. **Keffel** (17C) is a translation of the Welsh *ceffyl*;

it often implied the second-rate. **Prad**, for many years the basic slang term for horse, emerged in the 18C; it is linked to the Dutch paard (a horse) which in turn has its roots in the Latin paraveredus, which gives the SE palfrey: a riding horse as opposed to a war-horse. The 18C also offers **daisy-kicker**, with the pejorative variation **daisy-cutter**: a horse that refuses to raise its feet properly when moving. A **star-gazer** (18C) holds head up well when trotting.

General terms for horse in the 19C include gee and gee-gee (both from the 18C exhortation 'Gee up'!'), the rhy. sl. Charing Cross (pronounced à la Cockney 'crorss') and macaroni (pony), critter, (US, originally meaning bull, but soon extended to cover most farm animals), a trotter (racehorse) which if high-spirited is a bit of blood (fr. bloodstock) or a high-stepper. An undergraduate a horse in training. The British Army coined long-faced 'un and long-faced chum or friend; thus long-eared chum or bastard means a mule; both terms draw on the slightly early long-haired chum: a girlfriend. Lunk-head (now a fool or oaf) is possibly linked to long-head. 20C Australia offers crocodile.

Second-rate, inferior, old or broken-down horses attracted a number of terms. Jade (used by Chaucer c.1386) was an all-purpose put-down of such a beast, it could occasionally be applied to a donkey as well. Its use to mean 'faithless woman' does not appear until the 16C. Crock, (19C, broken down, either from Scots meaning old ewe, or from broken pots) Grogham (18C) meant simply old. Perhaps the best-known description of a 'bad' horse in the 19C was screw, a general term that had originally been applied to a racehorse that had to be 'screwed' (ridden hard and probably whipped) by its jockey. The ginger required similar efforts: it seemed a fast and showy horse, but had probably been figged, ie. made to look better than it was (fr. feague: to beat) prior to the race. The jib or jibber shirks running or jumping, as does the 20C dog, described as 'punting poison' and only racing when it feels like it. The old, exhausted scrub (also used for ageing cattle) or knacker was fit only for the knacker's yard, as were the broken-winded roarer, whistler and wind-sucker. A clumsy racehorse was a muddler, while a mount was dangerous and uncontrollable.

The ning-nang was a generally worthless horse; in Northern dialect it referred to humans too, and is linked to the 20C Australian ning-nong or nong, meaning a fool or worthless person. A weaver or wobbler was unable to keep to straight line when racing while the bonesetter or bone-shaker (later used for cars) gave its rider an uncomfortable journey. The donkey or ass is variously a burro (fr. the Spanish), a donk, a dickey (fr. Richard) or a moke (19C). This last comes either from the Welsh gypsy moxio or moxia: donkey, or from the cant word moak; like many names for animals moke is a diminutive, in this case of Margaret, just as donkey itself is short for Duncan. Other names include the Jerusalem pony (19C, from Christ's entry to Jerusalem), the Egyptian charger (possibly from their use by 'Egyptians' or gypsies), and the diminutives ned and neddy (17C) Jack or Tom.

#### DOGS AND CATS

Pets tend to have their own names, given by their human owners, but there are certain generic terms. The cat is a long-tailed beggar, baudrons (possibly from the Scotch Gaelic beadrach: a playful girl), a masheen (18C, from Shelta), puss (16C), Thomas (fr. tomcat), tib and tibby (18C) and moggy or mog (19C, from Margaret). The oldest slang term for dog is bufe, bufa or buffer (all 16C) all of which echo its bark; the echoic is also found, as it is in the childish moo-cow and baa-lamb, in bow-wow (18C). Other terms include goddie (backslang), mutt (20C, possibly from mutton-head, an affectionate gibe), pooch (19C, possibly from 'Putzi', a German pet name for any lapdog), a tyke (18C, from the Yorks, dial., and the term most beloved of Yorkshiremen bent on self-glorification). The rhyming slang alderman's nail (19C) means tail, while dog excrement can be dog, doggy-do, poo, poop or hocky (all 20C).

## **POULTRY**

The chicken has gained a number of slang names, among them the logical cackler and cackling-chete (16C, literally cackling thing, and thus the 17C cackling fart: an egg). Harman's Caveat also cites

Margery Prater, who appears in *The Joviall Crew* (1641) by playwright Richard Brome (c.1590-1652/3) amongst a number of farmyard peers: 'Here's Grunter and Bleater, with Tib of the Buttry\*, And Margery Prater, all drest without sluttry'. Prater comes from her constant clucking or 'prating', while margery echoes margery daw: jackdaw and margery howlet: an owl. Partlet, from the French and briefly English proper name Pertelote, was often used to mean hen, particularly as Dame Partlet; in 1481 Caxton, in the *Tale of Reynard the Fox*, speaks of 'Chantecler the cock, pertelot wyth alle theyr children'. Galeny (18C) meant chicken or guinea fowl, both from the Latin gallina meaning cock, while the nursery has provided chuck-chuck and chickabiddy (19C). Chook is the definitive term in Australia.

The duck is a quacking cheat (16C), quack or quacker (19C) and waddler; a lame duck is a defaulter on the Stock Exchange (and any office-holder, particularly a politician, who is serving out his or her time once a successor has been elected); waddle out of the alley (18C) means to default. A goose is roger or tib of the buttery (both 16C, although tib usually means cat) and, while not strictly poultry (albeit eaten elsewhere in Europe) a sparrow is either philip or the 19C rhyming slang bow and arrow (with a nod, presumably, to the death of Cock Robin).

## **INSECTS**

Other than the generic creepy-crawly (19C), skeeter (fr. mosquito) and policeman (19C) which meant a bluebottle (and was subsequently turned on its head when bluebottle\* emerged as a slang term for policeman) the bulk of insect-related slang refers to what the 19C termed flats and chits: bugs and lice. The bug, properly a bedbug, offers chinch, the heavy cavalry, dragoons or horsemen (cf: light cavalry and light troops), the mahogany flat, a Norfolk Howard (19C, in cruel memoriam of one Joseph Bug who changed his name to Norfolk Howard) and German ducks (18C) which were both bed bugs and, in the kitchen, half a sheep's head boiled with onions.

Lice are chates or chats (18C) according to Grose coming from chattels, meaning moveable property, typically livestock. Thus livestock itself (18C), black cattle (19C, also meaning a parson), saddle backs, gold backed 'uns (19C), greybacks and Hampstead donkeys all stress the 'cattle' context, while the proximity of lice appears in bosom friend (19C), friends in need (19C), gentlemen's companions or friends (18C, also used for fleas) and familiars (19C). The veteran crabs, abbreviating crab-lice, gives the 20C rhy. sl. taxi-cabs. Military associations are found in light troops (19C), light infantry (19C) and Scots Greys (19C); this latter gives the headquarters of the Scots Greys: a lousy head, and the Scots Greys are in full march by the Crown Office: lice are crawling on one's head. Active citizens (19C), creepers (17C) and crawlers (18C) emphasize the insects' motion, while crums or crumbs (19C) point up their diminutive size. To be lousy is to be silver-laced (19C). The most recent term cooties (20C) comes specifically from the Malayan for dog tick, but kutu itself is a general term in Polynesia for any kind of louse.

## THE FARMYARD

Aside from the many dialect terms for farmyard beasts, a cow is a router (Scots 19C, thus router-putters: hooves), while a Romford or Essex lion (17C) is a calf. Harman (16C) has lowing chete for calf, and bleating chete for lamb. A sheep is a Cotswold lion (15C) or, in Scotland, a Lammermoor lion (18C), a quaking cheat (16C, also occasionally a calf), a wool bird (18C), a havil (18C, although the SE meaning is a small crab) or a jimbugg (19C Aus., fr. jumbuck: an Aborigine term meaning white mist, ie. a flock of sheep). May gathering (19C) is sheep stealing. The pig is a grunting chete (16C), grunter or the libellous patrico's kinchen (16C, fr. patrico\*: priest and kinchen\*: a child).

## **OTHER**

A final selection includes Cambridge or fen nightingale (19C, a frog), lion or wat (15C, a hare; cf ned, philip and thomas), snag or snagg (a snail), and heffalump (a nursery term for elephant).

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## **LOVERS**

## THE LOVER

In common with much other early slang, the 16C term for lover or loved one borrows from the farmyard; in this case it is duck, used a such by Shakespeare, and slightly predating its 17C equivalent, pippin, which can also mean a good thing in general (thus see GOOD for its etymology). The 17C French romantic novel used flamme as one of its principal clichés; by the 19C flame had arrived in Britain, especially as in the extant old flame. Coincidentally (or perhaps pointedly) flame could also mean venereal disease. Sprat was a further affectionate diminutive, while Scotland provided the Kilmarnock whittle: a person of either sex who is engaged to be married (the dial. whittle means blanket; thus the term may refer to the practise of bundling: the sleeping together, albeit fully dressed, by unmarried couples).

Most 20C terms have their origins, like flame, in romantic fiction. Crush and pash (fr. SE passion) refer to an infatuation, the former originating in the US, the latter especially pertinent to the obsessions formed at girls' schools by a younger pupil for a teacher or an older girl; dreamboat, heart-throb, honeybunch, honeybun, sweetie and sweetie-pie (cf. sweetmeat\*) are staples of the most glutinous of love stories. A couple can be an item or a shack job (fr. shack up: live together); a former lover is an ex while a new one is fresh hide (AA); a casual partner is it, a one-night stand (punning on the theatrical jargon), a pick-up or a trick (see PROSTITUTION for etymology). A flirt or teaser is a gill-flirt or jilt (19C), a cock-teaser or prick-teaser (both terms mean penis) or if a man, somewhat contrivedly, a cunt-teaser.

## **BOYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS**

The boyfriend can be Mr Right, or even more optimistically Lord Right (both figures tend to be dreams rather than reality), one's old man (equally common as husband; in either sense the over208 LOVERS

riding feeling is of comfort) and daddy one or sweet daddy (AA). A girlfriend, as invariably dismissive as are all such terms that depict women through masculine eyes, can be a chick, dolly, frail, honey, sweet patootie, toots or tootsie (the etymologies of all of which can be found at WOMAN). Miss Right and Lady Right parallel their male equivalents, while Afro-Americans offer the unashamedly forthright main bitch, ordinary or mat. Main squeeze (20C) is marginally more affectionate while old lady (which moved from Cockney domesticity to the term of hippie choice during the late 1960s) is neutral, even amicable. Mum, normally mother, offers the same feelings of continuity as does steady. Rhy. sl. gives jam tart (19C) and Richard (Richard the Third: bird\*). The unflattering monotony puns on monogamy, sweetpea (20C) is ostensibly affectionate, although 19C rhy. sl. uses of the term include whiskey, tea or pee\* (urine).

#### THE MISTRESS

As far as slang is concerned the line between a mistress and a prostitute is in many cases all but invisible, and there are many crossovers. Those listed here are on the whole mistresses only. Loteby (fr. SE lote: to skulk or hide) and the related ludby are both 14C, where they mean paramour; they give the 17C ligby (perhaps fr. dial. lig: a bed). A natural, which could be found meaning whore, was equally common as mistress: in both cases the idea is of a woman bound by nature in her relationships, rather than by sanctified marriage vows; pure (17C) is heavily ironic as is miss (17C); a wife in watercolours (18C, see PROSTITUTION for etymology) predates the left-handed wife (19C, anything 'lefthanded' is de facto suspect). Pout (18C) comes from pullet: a young hen; the later 19C pouter means vagina. A rainbow (19C) is dressed in gaudy finery, a weekender (19C) is available only at weekends and while a jam (19C) is a mistress, a lawful jam is a wife. A she-familiar (19C) has overtones of the occult; SE familiar means a witch's demonic companion, although the other meaning. intimate, is obviously present. A smock toy can be male as well as female, depending, presumably, on whether the smock (a general

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term for things female) is the user of the toy or the toy herself. A bit of spare (20C) can be found as meaning mistress, although it usually means no more than an available girl, often at a party.

#### THE ADULTERER

Adultererous males (adulterous women get but rare mentions in slang - synonyms for whore are, yet again, far more convenient) lend themselves to literary euphemism. Actaeon (17C) comes from the stag's horns\* planted by the goddess Diana on his head after he had unwisely boasted that he was a greater hunter than herself. He was duly torn to pieces by his own hounds. Lothario also emerged in the 17C; the name comes from Sir William D'Avenant's (1606-68) play The Cruel Brother (1627); amongst its cast list is 'Lothario: a frantic young gallant'. Another contemporary term was buck face, using buck to mean cuckold despite is earlier, and concurrent use to mean dandy or man of spirit and fashion. The 18C freeman or freeman of bucks extended the use, as well as punning on Bucks: Buckinghamshire. The gentleman of the back door\* (18C) was a sodomite, but the back-door man (19C), who sneaked in by the literal back door, was an adulterer as was the fancy man (originally a pimp and still extant). The freelance (19C) was an habitual adultress, though not a professional whore, despite the commercial aspects of the term. The 20C equivalent of fancy man, or woman, is a bit\* on the side. To cuckold is to give horns, hornify, shoe-horn or to get the bull's feather (17C), described as 'a new feather made of an old horn'. Finally the 15C wittol was a complaisant husband who made no effort to discourage his wife's adventuring; the term comes from the SE woodwale: a bird that is often the target of a cuckoo, who palms its own offspring off in the woodwale's nest.

## TO SEDUCE

To seduce (all 20C) is variously to georgia or georgy (AA), get across, get off with, get next to (AA) get one's leg over, go case with (which also means to live with or have a long-term relationship), have, have it away with, have one over, make,

nail, prong, reel in the biscuit and race off (Aus.). To fail in one's seduction is to strike out (US, from baseball); to ask a girl are you saving it for the worms? is an attempt to overcome her resistance. Been there (predating today's dismissive been there, done that) refers to a previous sexual partner, while comments indicative of sexual distaste include the irredeemably sexist don't fancy yours, I wouldn't fuck her with your prick, I wouldn't fuck her with a borrowed prick, I wouldn't touch it with yours and I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot barge-pole. To be sexually excited is to be begging for it, dripping for it, fruity, horny, hot or hot for, hot to trot, randy, sexed up; 19C terms include cunny-haunted, cunt-struck, proud and prime.

Caresses include a bit of slap and tickle, bush patrol, finger pie, groping, lovey-dovey, parking, (cf. parallel parking) PDA (public display of affection), pecking and necking (AA), stink-finger and stinky-finger. To get to first base is to make initial sexual contact (fr. baseball, cf. strike out). To caress can be to canoodle, climb all over, cock pluck (Afro-American), cop a feel, dry-fuck, feel up, finger-fuck, goose, guzzle, make out and make out with, mess about, neck, smooch, smoodge (Aus.), snog, watch the submarines; to play footsie is to rub feet beneath a table. To kiss is to slake (19C), chew face, mug, poof, suck face (19C: to enjoy drinking) and swap spit.

## SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

## **FOREPLAY**

Prior to intercourse comes foreplay and while compared with the massive numbers of words relating to love-making those describing foreplay are tiny, they should still appear first.

The earliest use of caterwaul relates to the howling of rutting cats; unsurprisingly the 16C adopted it for human purposes, quieting the noise, but accentuating the mutual stimulation that

leads on to more intimate pleasures. Another 16C term fumble might seem more relevant to foreplay, and links easily with the 17C fiddle. Firkytoodle (17C) in this context also means to play with, but firk itself meant beat, a concept so often associated with sex. The dildo, as the OED has it, 'a word of obscure origin, used in the refrains of ballads' is usually found meaning an artificial phallus and comes from the Italian diletto or (ladies') delight (the Italians also called the instrument a passatempo or 'pass the time'). In the context of foreplay the male fingers act as the stimulant and act, it might be felt, as an artificial artificial penis.

The 18C has feel, or feel one's way to heaven while the 19C plays on the term fish\*, meaning vagina, for ling grappling (ling\*: vagina) and get a handful of sprats; the image of unpleasant vaginal odours is carried on in play stinkfinger. Canoodle and spoon (19C, also meaning a fool) convey a kindlier tone, although mess, giddle (Scots dial.), nug (more usually meaning to have sex), tip the long or middle finger or simply finger and grope spare few feelings. Clitorize is coldly anatomical, fam means to handle intimately and crooky more usually means to walk arm in arm, from the crook of the linked elbows. The 20C's finger-fuck and the cognate noun finger-pie have a suitably modern cold-bloodedness.

## **FUCKING AND SWIVING**

'The vivid expressiveness and the vigorous ingenuity of these synonyms bear witness to the fertility of English and to the enthusiastic English participation in the universal fascination of the creative act.' Thus Eric Partridge, in his edition of *Grose*, and there is no single human activity, other than drinking and its effects, that has attracted so wide a slang lexicon.

The most basic of such synonyms, fuck, remains for many the ultimate in taboo terms, although it may just be shaded by cunt\* in any sweepstakes of opprobrium. The term emerges at the start of the 16C, its first OED citation is in 1503, in a line from the poetry of William Dunbar (?1456-?1513) and finds its first dictionary listing in John Florio's Worlde of Wordes (1598): 'Fottere, to iape,

to sard, to fucke, to swive, to occupy.' Through this period it remained SE, although by c.1690 it was moving fast into taboo where it has stayed, despite efforts of modern and post-modern novelists and of the critic Ken Tynan who remarked in 1967 to much furore that surely no intelligent person could any longer be frightened of the word - how wrong he was. The etymology of fuck defeats the OED. The logical link is to the German ficken, which means exactly the same, but semantically there are no links and temptation must resisted. Eric Partridge, never loathe to take on the toughest of words, was convinced that real link is to the Latin pungare: to strike, which seems substantially likely, given the extent of synonymous terms meaning exactly that. One suggestion that can be discounted is the theory noted in Geoffrey Hughes' Swearing (1991) that 'Fuck originated from a royal injunction at the time of the Plague, when it was very necessary to procreate; it was a code word in which the letters stood for "fornicate under command of the King".' Professor Hughes, of course, was not subscribing to the theory.

Given its negative image, fuck has engendered a number of bowdlerisations, all striving to some extent to echo the genuine article. Aside from the rhyming slang **Donald Duck** and **goose and duck**, there are variously **fugle**, **futz**, **fulke** (coined by Byron in *Don Juan* [1819-24]), **futter** (coined by Sir Richard Burton, from the French *foutre*), **fug** (in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* [1949]) and **fugh** (concocted by Brendan Behan in *Borstal Boy* [1958]). **Fickey-fick**, **fuckle** and **fucky-fucky**, while hardly euphemistic, do attempt to soften the grosser word.

Two words precede fuck in the copulatory lexicon: sard and swive. Sard, amongst those cited by Florio (the others are all 15-16C), dates back to the 10C when the Lindisfarne Gospel uses it in its translation of Matthew v. 27. By the 17C it was the basis of 'a Nottingham proverb': Go teach your Grandam to sard, but vanished soon afterwards. Swive, which can still be found occasionally in self-consciously 'literary' contexts, dates to c.1440, and lasted as SE until 1700, when it, like fuck, entered the realms of the taboo. Its origin is in the OE. swifan, meaning to move in a course, sweep and the Old Norse svifa to rove, ramble or drift. A third term mell,

while 14C and meaning in SE to blend or mix, is more a euphemism than a proper slang term.

## TO HIT, STRIKE OR BEAT

Of all the many terms for copulation, no group is so wide-ranging as those which, if given a single, unifying label, essentially mean to hit, beat, strike, shake or otherwise assault. As noted above, fuck itself may well stem from such a term, and term follows term thereafter, all the way through to today's bonk.

The first such term is foin (14C) which in SE meant to make a thrust with pointed weapon; two centuries on and one finds labour or stretch leather (leather\*: vagina), job (job, from jab means to prod, itself a term for intercourse), knock (which stems both from the 'assault' and from nock\* or notch\* meaning vagina; thus the later knocked up: pregnant), shake (cf. shag), shake the sheets and swinge (SE swinge: castigate). Swinge leads on to the 17C switch (also meaning beat), lap clap (clap: beat), thrum (meaning thrash), scour, invade (a literary euphemism), nodge or nudge, prig (cf. prick) and shake a skin-coat (skin-coat: vagina). The 18C has screw (perhaps the first, and certainly the longest-lasting of what one might term sex as a do-it-yourself task, typified in its much later combination, the carpenter's dream: 'flat as a board and easy to screw'). Other 18C terms include nub (in which nub either implies the protruding penis, or comes from the dial. term meaning to jog or shake), snabble (which also means arrest), split, bumbaste (otherwise to beat), hump (18C) plug, drill (also meaning to 'feel up'), spit (and put four quarters on the spit) and prod. Punch means specifically to deflower; the SE punch: to pierce) while shag dates to the 14C when as SE it too meant shake. One last veteran term emerges from the 18C, although it existed as SE long before: ride dates to Middle English, joining its fellow synonyms in language's Private Case by the 18C.

The violent motif continues into the 19C with **bob** (also to strike or slap), **bore** (as in bore a hole), **bounce**, **brush** (hit), **bung** (hit), **club** (cf. **club**: penis), **flimp** (usually knock), **hustle**, **jounce** (to shake), **impale**, **spread** (the woman is spread for sex), **peg** and

perforate and pluck (both with the accent on defloration). Country life gives plough (ploughshare: penis; the 20C has till), plowter (also meaning to splash about in mire or water; cf. paddle) and the US plow the back forty, as well as the sporting shoot, shoot in the bush, shoot in the tail (with a secondary meaning of sodomise) or stab in the thigh (Shakespeare already used stab in 16C). More aggression can be found in poke, pound, rake, rasp, rummage, stick, strike, towze, touzle, muddle, muss, tumble and give a tumble, trounce (SE thrash) stuff, serve (usually meaning treat roughly) get into, go through, grind (also have a grind, do a grind) and sharge (a dialect term possibly related to sharg[e], meaning to grind).

The 20C's monosyllabic biff, bang, bonk, tonk, lay (though lie with and lie on are both Shakespearian), make, off (Sixties' radical slang for to kill), plank, plonk, pogue (fr. poke), pork (cf. pork sword\*: penis), root (Aus.; the all-purpose equivalent to fuck, as popular in such phrases as get rooted as in describing intercourse; in parallel is Wellington: rhy. sl. Wellington boot), rout (SE: defeat or bore into) have all the subtlety of a Tom and Jerry cartoon, but contemporary coinages can be slightly more inventive. Australia offers spear the bearded clam, while Black America has bust some booty (booty\*: vagina), hit skins (a descendant, surely of 18C wriggle navels and a cousin of the modern rub offal), mash the fat and pile. Cut a side is the Afro-American equivalent of cut a slice off the joint, as is knock it out parallel to knock it off or knock off a piece (and the synonymous tear off a piece) Knock off has the added inference of seduction. Other terms include throw, scrape (cf. rasp), schtup (fr. the Yid. / Ger. stupsen: push) and most unashamedly of all: hop on a babe.

## **ANIMALS**

Less common in the modern industrial world, but widely used in a society still rooted in the rural life, are those terms that seek their inspiration in animal life. The oldest example is **tup** (16C), nominally a young bullock; its anthropomorphic role comes in Shake-speare's Othello (1604), when Iago informs Brabantio that, 'An old

blacke Ram Is tupping your white Ewe.' The 16C also has clicket (which in animal terms applied to foxes) and mount, which described any animal coupling. Cover (17C), service and tread (and 19C chuck a tread) are similarly general terms. Rifle (17C) described the hawk treading the hen, tom (19C) came from the male or tom-cat, caulk (19C) came either from caulking or stuffing, or from another term used for a male bird treading the female. Hog (19C), horse (17C) and dog all acknowledged the animal kingdom, although bitch related more directly to the 15C term for whore (although that, of course, had its canine origins). The modern dogging, probably coincidentally, refers to the practice of spying on others having sex in parked cars. Roger (18C), came from the popular name for a bull, while to play the goat was to copulate energetically. The relation of the 19C ferret to the 20C exercise the ferret is probably no more than chance. Tether one's nags on (17C) plays on nag: horse or penis.

#### USING THE GENITALS

The elaborate strategems of safe sex notwithstanding, sexual intercourse remains dependent on genital contact and this being so a number of slang terms are based on the genitals. Those meaning penis are cock\* (19C), prick\*, dibble and diddle\* (19C), jock (17C, from jockum\*), pestle\* and pizzle\*(19C, the latter also meaning an animal's penis), pole\* and shaft\* (both 20C), spike and mow (16C, from the Scots / Northern dialect mowdiwarp\* = mole = penis). Stitch (and go on the stitch), while not meaning penis, implies the in-out 'stitching' motion of copulation, with the penis as a needle; the 19C sew has similar roots, while sew up means to impregnate. Terms relating to the vagina are hole\* (19C, also as get one's hole), quiff\* (18C, although quiff as vagina is apparently 20C), quim\* (17C), tail\* (18C) and trim\*. Relevant phrases include lay some pipe (20C, pipe: vagina, lay: to copulate), skin the cat (cf. skin the pizzle), take Nebuchadnezzar out to grass (19C, the Biblical monarch ate grass and thus 'liked his greens\*'; thus Nebuchadnezzar: penis), join paunches, join giblets and have a bit of giblet pie (all 18C), nail two warnes

(Scots dial.: bellies) together, rub offal (20°C), slip her a length and slip it to her (both 19°C), the Scots slip in Daintie Davie or Willie Wallace, and slip her a quick crippler (20°C, with overtones of hostility). Other terms include put it in and break it, peel one's best end in, strop one's beak and strip one's tarse (all 19°C). Typical of the 19°C's often ponderous puns is make a settlement in tail, doubtless amusing the legal profession with its references to entail and thus both tail, meaning vagina, and the French taille meaning assessment.

#### WHORING

A few terms accentuate the world of prostitution, especially that of the brothel. They include occupy (16C) from occupying house\*, vault (17C) meaning leap or jump but also from vaulting house\*, nug (17C), from nug meaning nudge and from nugging house\* and accomodate (19C) from accomodation house\*. To bitch (19C) is to go whoring, from bitch (15C) meaning whore; buttock (18C) and flap (17C) both mean whore as does split-arse mechanic in the 19C verb to take on a split arse-mechanic.

## THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The 16C offers two of the most basic of terms: do and have. 'I have done thy mother' writes Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* (?1590), while 'I'll have her —but I will not keep her long' can be found in *Richard III* (1591). Shakespeare also has line, as in line or fill a cupboard: 'Winter garments must be lined, so must slender Rosalind' (*As You Like It* [1599]), grope for trout in a peculiar river (*Measure for Measure* [1604]) and make the beast with two backs (*Othello* [1604]). Jape, one of those terms listed by Florio in 1598, dates to the 14C, when as SE it meant to trick and thus to seduce a woman; consigned to taboo by 1600, it soon vanished, although it re-emerged in the late 19C to mean schoolboy pranks, especially as found in turn-of-the-century school stories. Thomas Harman cites tonygle ('to niggle') in his *Caveat* (1567), while Florio further includes ginicomtwig, a word of the 'thingumibob'

family and as such a euphemism. Other early terms include feeze or pheeze (also to beat), flesh or flesh it and jumble. Dock means specifically to deflower, and comes either from the punning farmyard image of docking a tail\* or from the Romany dukker. to ravish. Finally comes wap (also in Harman) and a wapping mort or whore: 'wapping Dell that niggles well...' appears in Dekker's 'Bing out, bien Morts' (1612).

### THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Many 16C terms continued on into the next century, where they were joined by jumm (coined by Thomas Urquhart for his translation of Rabelais), play at pickle-me-tickle-me, bumfiddle (usually a noun meaning buttocks), poop (also meaning buttocks, and as poop-noddy: sexual intercourse), cavault (fr. Latin cavolta: riding), leap, jump and jump up and down (source of the later give one a jump), smoke and twang. Lerricompoop, otherwise unknown, probably played on lerricomtwang, a fool. To ride a St George was for the woman to straddle the man; such a position was apparently that recommended for couples desirous of conceiving a future bishop. To blow the groundsels punned on 'ground', where one might lie, and to go on Hobbes' voyage referred to the last words of the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who stated, 'I am about to take my last voyage: a great leap in the dark.'

The 18C gives palliardise (fr. the palliard\*, the itinerant beggar who slept on straw [paille in French]), huddle (also meaning hug), do it, go facemaking (the face was that of an as yet unborn child), chuck, cross, rig (fr. rig: a prank, thus to play) and nick. In SE tump meant to pile a mound of earth round a root. Ease meant particularly to deflower, and added an inference of ease, as used in 'relieving oneself' in the lavatory. The 20C drop one's load and empty one's trash (both AA) have the same feel, as does lift a leg on, although this may be better related to get one's leg over. Huffle (cited by Grose in his first edition, but dropped thereafter) is an early equivalent of the 20C bagpipe, coyly defined as 'witus in axilla', in other words rubbing the penis against the partner's

armpit.' To engage in three to one (and bound to lose) suggests a conflict between the penis and two testicles and the vagina. To Adam and Eve it refers to the Garden of Eden and the Fall therefrom, while wind up the clock may have its origins in a mildy coarse scene in the novel *Tristram Shandy*.

#### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Aside from the many combinations with do, have, etc. the 19C, always a forcing ground for new slang, provides a number of fresh terms. Greens, as in get one's greens, emerges as a term for sexual intercourse; variations include the green-grove (pubic hair), to be after one's greens (of a man), to be on for greens (of a woman) and to give a green gown (sex on the grass, possibly with the loss of virginity). Chauver, pronounced and often spelt charver and surviving today, came from the Parylaree charva which in turn was based on the French chauffer, to heat or the Romany charvo: to touch or meddle with. The food motif continues with strain one's greens, relish, nibble and taste. Pleasure has a slightly romantic air, along with its variations pleasure boat, garden, ground and the palace of pleasure, all meaning vagina, and the pleasure garden padlock: a menstrual cloth. Less fanciful are bellybump, rump, block, frisk, fiddle, whack it up, wallop it in, do ill to, paddle (coming either from the SE: to spank, or possibly from the wetness of vaginal emissions), do over and have a bit of bum. Come about and come aloft smack of the sea. and the latter also means to have an erection. Qualify, perform on, get one's end away, see and the 20C give a seeing-to are equally unromantic, though to see the stars lying on one's back has a pleasantly al fresco air.

Adamize has a Biblical tone, although at the Sandhurst military school to Adamize a cadet was to lower him naked onto the parade ground, his only chance of re-entering his quarters was by presenting himself to the guard. Flourish also meant to expose oneself, while flutter drew on the noun meaning any form of sexual experience; jiggle came from jiggling bone\*: the penis, and jig-a-jig or jig-jig were essentially echoic, cf. the various

combinations at dance\*. Jiggy-jig, while apparently similar, was a specifically Indian Army term, apparently an 'exclamation of delight used by Indian women during sexual intercourse.'

Frig, originally meaning masturbate, takes on what has become its more permanent meaning; dip it and dip one's wick (fr. rhy. sl. Hampton wick\*:prick\*) predate the 20C Afro-American dip the fly, as stroke leads similarly to today's take a stroke. Have it, have it in and have it up develop the 16C's plain have; man and go with are bald, if ultimately euphemistic. Getting one's hair cut and seeing a sick friend are both excuses offered by a man slipping out of the house to find alternative pleasures.

Jink means rattle (itself a 20C term) though usually money, jack and jack up are possibly linked to jack (as in jill), 'a male sweetheart'; snib originates in the Scots snibbet meaning intercourse; turn up infers, perhaps, the 'turning up' of the woman's buttocks. Perhaps the least likely 19C term is jazz, which by the 1920s was established worldwide in the context of the latest thing in music. But as the magazine Étude put it in 1924, 'If the truth were known about the origin of the word "Jazz" it would never be mentioned in polite society.' and three years later America's Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology declared that 'the word jazz...used both as a verb and as a noun to denote the sex act...has long been common vulgarity among Negroes in the South'.

Longer phrases include feed the dummy or feed the dumb glutton, put the devil into hell, get jack in the orchard, fire in the air and do a bit of front-door work, play a tune on the one-holed flute (and equally 'musical' strum); both dive into the dark and take a turn on shooter's hill survive in today's Afro-American culture. Finally the 19C, as one might expect, offers a number of euphemisms: caress, compress, embrace, fondle, handle, kiss, know (in the Biblical sense), please, solace and oblige.

### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The occasional romanticism of the 19C fades with the progression of its successor. Ball (US), snag (fr. SE snag: to catch), gee (fr. gee

up: to encourage), mess around, meddle with and stoop are strictly practical. Score between the posts (Aus.), be on the job, lay the leg, lift arse on, make it with, and selection of Afro-Americanisms: do the do, do the nasty, do the natural thing, do the pussy, fill one up and skeet are equally uncompromising. Love up and do a kindness are euphemistic and thus softer, while play fathers and mothers or play mummies and daddies presumably appeal to those who enjoy lovers' baby-talk and play night baseball (cf. ball) is for the sports, as, on another level, is to play hide the salami. Honeyfuck and honeyfuggle, meaning both stimulate as well as copulate, have slightly paedophiliac overtones—a honey tends to mean a younger girl. Feature with is an Australian euphemism while drop 'em, 'em' being panties, refers strictly to women.

A selection of specific terms include roof it (to have sex on the roof), to talk fuck (to talk obscenely during intercourse) and to come across (to allow seduction). To copulate enthusiastically is to bang like the shithouse door in a gale (Aus.), to go in and out like a fiddler's elbow, to go up her like a rat up a drain (Aus.), to rip her guts down (AA), to screw the arse off, and to shag like a rattlesnake (usually said of a woman). An enthusiastic lover is good at the game or nimble hipped. To draw one's fireworks (19C) is to cool one's ardour by coition.

#### \*\*\*\*\*

Aside from those already listed, slang has created dozens of phrases that draw on terms for the genitals or for intercourse which are rendered verbs by the addition of some otherwise neutral verb of action, ie. dance, go, do, have and so on. These terms are listed below. Further details (etymologies, etc.) may be found under the relevant entry, typically at PENIS, VAGINA etc.

## TO DANCE

The blanket hornpipe, the buttock jig, the goat's jig, on the mattress or the mattress jig, the married man's cotillion, the matrimonial polka, the miller's reel, the reels o' Bogie, the

reels of Stumpie (Scots dial.; the nouns perhaps both meaning penis), to the tune of shaking the sheets (without music), with your arse to the ceiling the kipples (Scots dial.: couple), Sallinger's round (17C, Sallinger being St Leger and the dance a popular ballad).

#### To Go

Ballocking, beard-splitting, bed-pressing, belly-bumping, bitching, bum fighting, bum-working, bum-tickling, bum-faking (fake: to make), bush ranging, buttock-stirring, birds-nesting, buttocking, cockfighting, cunny catching (punning on 16C cant coney-catching\*), doddling, drabbing, fleshing it, fleshmongering, goosing, to Hairyfordshire, hunting, jottling, jumming, leather-stretching, on the loose, motting, molrowing, pile driving, prick scouring, quim sticking, rumping, rump splitting, strumming, twatting, twat faking, vaulting, wenching, womanizing, working the dumb, double or hairy oracle, twat raking, tromboning (cf bagpiping), tummy tickling, quim wedging, tail twitching, bottom hole working, under petticoating and all the way.

## TO HAVE OR DO A BIT OF

Beef, business, burn dancing, cauliflower (18C, from cauliflower: a large white wig, 'such as is worn by the dignified clergy'; it came to mean vagina, according to Grose after a woman used the term in court and was duly reproved by a the Judge, 'saying she might as well call it artichoke. Not so, my lord, replied she; for an artichoke has a bottom, but a \*\*\*\* and a cauliflower have none.'), cock, cock-fighting, cunt, curly greens, fish, fish on a fork, fun, off the chump end, flat, front door work, giblet pie, gut stick, cream stick, sugar stick, jam, keifer (fr. khyfe: a woman as sex object; poss. from the Arabic keyif: 'the amiable beauty of a fair woman'), ladies' tailoring (cf. needlework, sew), meat, mutton, pork, quimsy, rough, sharp and blunt (rhy. sl.), stuff, split mutton (cf. mutton), skirt and summer cabbage.

#### TO HAVE OR DO OR PERFORM

A ballocking, a bit, a lassie's by-job, a bedward bit, a beanfeast in bed, a belly warmer, a blindfold bit, a bottom wetter, a bout, a brush with the cue, a dive in the dark, a drop in, a double fight, a four legged frolic, a fuck, a futter, a game in the cock loft, a goose and duck (rhy. sl.), a grind, a hoist-in, a jottle, a jumble giblets, a jumble up, an inside worry, a leap (up the ladder), a little of one with the other, a mount, a mow, a nibble, a plaster of warm guts (18C), a poke, a put, a rasp, a ride, a roger, a rootle, a rush up the straight, a shot at the bull's eye, a slide up the board, a squirt and a squeeze, a touch off, a tumble in, a wet 'un, a wipe at the place, a wallop in, a back scuttle, a buttered bun (17C), a dog's marriage, a knee trembler, a St George, a bit of rabbit-pie, a cut or slice off the joint, a dash in the bloomers, a dash up the Channel, a shag, a tumble, one's greens, one's oats, to have it away (with) and to have been there (20C, a dismissive remark probably referring to a passing girl).

## TO GET OR GIVE

To get: a shot of leg (AA), into one's pants, (20C), on top of, get one's ashes hauled, get one's cookies, one's jollies, one's leg over, one's oats (20C, from wild oats, thus the sex is probably adulterous), get one's rocks off (20C, rocks: testicles, cf. 12C stones), get some big leg (20C), get some cock, some pussy, some tail, get some (20C). Verbs with give are give her a length, give her one, give some body and give the dog a bone.

## TO PLAY AT

All fours, Adam and Eve, belly-to-belly, brangle (SE: shake, dance), buttock, buttock and leave her, cherry pit, couple or wriggle your navels, cuddle my cuddie, Hey Gammer Cook (possibly from gammocks: wild play?), fathers and mothers, the first game ever played, Handie Dandie (16C, Scots), Hooper's Hide, cock in cover, houghmagandie (16C, from

hough = hock = back of the knee, plus 18C canty: cheerful, active), in and in (17C), in and out, Irish whist, (cf. Irish toothache) where the Jack takes Ace, level-coil (17C, from the similarly named rough game), mumble-peg, prick the garter (fr. a fraudulent game based on pricking the loop of a belt with a bodkin), pully-hauly (18C, SE rough and tumble), push-pin (17C), itch-buttocks (17C), put in all, stable my naggie (19C, cf. horse), thread the needle (cf. stitch), tops and bottoms, top sawyer, two handed put (put = putain = whore) and up tails all (17C, from the name of a song).

### TO TAKE A TURN

All but two of these terms refer to the genitals or pubic hair: in Cock Alley, Bushey Park, Cock Lane, Cupid's Alley, Cupid's Corner and Hair Court; on Shooter's Hill, Love Lane and Mount Pleasant, through the stubble, among the cabbages, up her petticoats, among her frills and among the parsley.

## WOMEN ONLY

As must be apparent, particularly from the predominant air of violence amongst them, the bulk of these terms presume a masculine point of view on love-making. Certain terms, however, relate only to women.

This vocabulary includes to do the naughty, turn up one's tail, lift one's leg, open up, take Nebuchadnezzar out to grass, look at the ceiling, play one's ace (ace:the pudendum), take in and do for, give standing room for one only, get hulled between wind and water, take one's medicine (also used for becoming drunk) and go star-gazing. The exhaustion of the post-coital male is seen in draw a cork and take the starch out of, while the links between food and sex are underlined by suck the sugar stick, take in beef, catch an oyster (19C, oyster meaning semen, although it can also mean vagina) and take in cream, skin the live rabbit, feed one's pussy, get a bellyful of marrow pudding and have a hot pudding or a live sausage for supper. A further group includes give mutton for beef, give

juice for jelly, and the cognate, if not food-based give soft for hard and give a hot poultice for the Irish toothache.

As in the larger vocabulary, there are several verb combinations: verbs with do are do a spread, a tumble, a back fall, what mother did before me or what Eve did with Adam; those with get are get outside it, stabbed in the thigh, a bit of goose's neck (cf. turkey neck\*), a go at the creamstick, a handle for the broom, shot in the tail, a shove in one's blind eye, a wet bottom, what Harry gave Dolly, a green gown, one's leg lifted, one's kettle mended, one's chimney swept (out), one's leather stretched, and get an arselins coup (fr. arselin[g]s meaning backward plus coup meaning blow or fall).

#### SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Although the preceding sections should have covered the bulk of terms meaning sexual intercourse, albeit usually in a verb form, herewith a concluding section in which it is hoped any escapees may be rounded up and itemised. All these are nouns, although it should be apparent that many of the verbs listed above can similarly be used as nouns, e.g. lay, legover, bonk and many others.

The 17C has the business while the 18C offers Hooper's hide (fr. hide and seek, cf. hide the salami\*) and the Biblical euphemism the fruit that made man wise (cf. Adam and Eve it). The 19C brings four legged frolic, shift work or shift service (shift: movement), matrimonial (specifically the missionary position), sport and sport of Venus (a literary euphemism), perpendicular (intercourse while standing up, cf. horry, horizontal and knee-trembler), naughties (Aus.) and nookie (fr. nug\*).

Modern coinages include a bit of the other and a bit of how's-yer-father (originally a World War I music hall catchphrase, meaning thingummy; cf. ginicomtwig) and you know what; a bunk-up, a bush patrol, fratting (fr. SE fraternizing), ground rations, horizontal jogging, a horizontal rumble (rumble: a fight) and a horry (Aus.). Indoor sledging, interior decorating, and parallel parking carry on the puns. Afro-American terms include a dead shot, a jack in the box, a thrill and chill and a

hot fling (possibly related to the 16C fling: to wriggle the buttocks during intercourse). Other terms include nasty, nobbing (fr. nob\*: penis), oats, a roll in the hay, rubadub and turking (fr. turkey neck\*). Perhaps the most celebrated modern coinage, at least in the UK, is Ugandan discussions or talking about Uganda, terms first used in the satirical magazine Private Eye. It was popularly thought to have been derived from the alleged discovery, in flagrante delicto, of Uganda's female Minister of Foreign Affairs in an airport lavatory, and was so underwritten by the magazine; this theory was latterly repudiated by the writer Corinna Adam, whose letter to The Times (Sept 1983) claimed that in 1971 a passionate (male) literary critic was the first to offer this excuse.

Other terms include straight shot (intercourse without contraception) and a dog's match (sex in the bushes or by the wayside). Spontaneous intercourse: is variously bip-bam-thank-you mam, a bump, a fast-fuck, a quickie, and wham bam thank-you mam. Lunchtime intercourse is an afternoon delight, funch (fuck plus lunch) or a nooner; the killing floor (AA) is where one has sex. Coitus interuptus can be getting off at Redfern (Aus.: the station before Sydney Central), at Gateshead or at Edge Hill (the stops respectively before Newcastle on Tyne and Liverpool Lime Street), getting off at Hillgate (with references to hill: the mons veneris and a gate, which can be closed) and leaving before the gospel.

Sex without ejaculation is a flash in the pan or a dry bob; an impotent man is free of Fumbler's Hall\*, a fumbler or a mugwump. Two fat people making love makes for melting moments while warming one's husband's supper is to sit in front of fire with lifted skirts.

## **ORGASM**

The orgasm, the climax of intercourse, is the big O, come or cum. 20C terms for achieving one's orgasm include to come or cum, to cheese, get one's gun off, get one's rocks off, light off, pop one's nuts, shoot or shoot off, shoot one's load, shoot one's wad, come one's cocoa, come one's fat, cream, pop one's

cork; to have a double shot is to ejaculate twice. Their 19C predecessors are to give one's gravy or to get home; to give one's partner an orgasm is to ring one's bell or ring one's chimes.

## **HOMOSEXUALITY**

#### **EARLY TERMS**

Given the age-old existence of male homosexuality, the slang vocabulary, while extensive, is notably reticent until the late 19C. Doubtless this reflects the public abhorrence of this aspect of human sexuality, but certainly, those words that precede the 20C are few and far between.

Earliest among them are the 16C sellary (fr. the Latin sellarius, one who sits upon a sella, a couch) and spintry (fr. Latin spintria), both of which meant a male whore. The latter, a century later, had become a meeting place for homosexuals, the modern cottage. Ganymede (the cupbearer to Zeus) and bardache (16C, from SE bardash) both mean catamite as does angelina (an angel is the older man). A further 16C term was Jesuit (1630) product of a general loathing of Jesuits, whose name was used in a variety of negative contexts, not always sexual. The 18C coined molly, Miss Molly and moll, plus moll-house meaning gay meeting-house, all of which equated effeminacy with a word that in other contexts meant a whore, while madge-cull (madge-cove in the 19C) was a variation on mag, meaning a sodomite and possibly taken from maggie, usually meaning a girl. Gentleman of the back door and backgammon player are both puns on anal intercourse.

Sod (19C) is an abbreviation of sodomite, while mary ann, nancy, nan-boy, Miss Nancy and margery are all girls' names; gussie, from Augustus, is an Australian parallel. Faddle originally meant a trifler, cissie and sissy (late 19C) both come from SE sister, while renter precedes the modern rent boy. More complex is cockquean (1830) a pun on cotquean (a peasant housewife) and

thus, in this slang form, a man who 'acts the housewife'. Finally come smockface (smock is a generic term for woman), soft, white liver (originally a coward), pap-mouth and the Irish bud sullogh. All are cited in Farmer and Henley but do not appear to have any other sources. The adjective baker-kneed (17C) meant originally knock-kneed; its use in the gay context either implies that all homosexuals are knock-kneed, or that women's legs are never straight. A green and yellow fellow is more allusive than slangy, and comes from the late 19C greenery-yallery: of, pertaining to, or affecting the colours green and yellow, in accordance with the style or fashion of the contemporary 'aesthetic' movement and thus, in short, affected. W S Gilbert used it in Patience (1880) when he derided a 'greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery,/Foot-in-the-grave young man.

#### **CENTRAL TERMINOLOGY**

As in most areas of slang, there emerge a number of key terms that stand above the mass of synonymous material. In the case of homosexuality, these terms are gay, fag, fairy, queen or quean, queer, poof, and bugger. Before moving on to the wider vocabulary, they should be considered first.

Gay (20C) dates back to the late 18C, when, often allied to 'woman' or 'girl' it meant a promiscuous woman, even a prostitute. Thus a gay house was a brothel, to be gay was to be promiscuous, gay in the legs, groin or arse meant promiscuity, the gaying instrument was a penis and gaying it meant copulation. The use of the term as a self-description by homosexuals originated during World War II, when it was probably an abbreviation of the old US tramps' slang geycat, meaning the young homosexual companion of an older tramp, also known as a gonsel, but the wider use in the heterosexual world did not begin until c.1970, with the emergence of the Gay Liberation Front, first in America and subsequently in the UK. The subsequent three-letter man is presumably g-a-y. Gonsel itself, most famously personified in Elmer, the young, inadequate hoodlum of Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon (1930, film 1941) is often mistranslated as gunman, while the 20C

punk and punce are also catamites. Synonymous with gunsel is jocker or jockey (20C US, from 16C jockum\*: penis).

Fag, farg, faggot or fagola, these days almost invariably seen as US coinages, have an older, if debatable UK etymology. One, somewhat fanciful version, suggests that a faggot was used in the burning heretics, and thus became transferred to the name of an embroidered patch (like the pink triangles of the Nazi concentration camps) worn by unburnt heretics; homosexuals are certainly heretics, therefore faggot means homosexual. More feasible is the descent from the 18C use of faggot as woman (thus playing on homosexual effeminacy), especially in the derogatory form of a baggage, which does stem from the faggots that one had to haul to the fire. A link with the British public school fag—a junior boy performing menial tasks—is also feasible. Finally there is the Yiddish faygele meaning little bird (thus the synonym birdie), and thence homosexual. Pig Latin plays on fag to add afgay and agfay.

The fairy (late 19C) started life in the UK meaning, with heavy irony, a drunken old hag; the link with homosexuality seems to stem from a piece, however implausible, that was published in 1895 in vol. VII of the American Journal of Psychology. It talked of 'the peculiar societies of inverts. Coffee-clatches, where the members dress themselves with aprons, etc., and knit, gossip and crotchet; balls, where men adopt the ladies' evening dress, are well known in Europe. "The Fairies" of New York are said to be a similar secret organization.' The later pixie is an obvious synonym.

Poof, poofta and poofter (both Aus.), poove and powder puff (notoriously used to attack the silent movie god Rudolph Valentino) all stem from puff, although the OED has an 1850 citation for poof, whereas puff only appears in 1902 (although the Dictionary still sees poof as a synonym for puff). The inference, as in faddle\* and the similar mince (from mincing steps) and chichi or ki-ki) is of unmanly fussiness. Allied terms are the rhy. sl. jam duff (puff), horse's hoof and iron (fr. iron hoof: poof; its most celebrated use was in The Scaffold's reference, in 'Thank You Very Much' to the 'Aintree iron', the late Brian Epstein, theirs and the Beatles' gay manager). Foop and fooper are backslang.

In the 17C queer was a staple of the cant lexicon; the opposite of rum\*, meaning good, it meant bad and was found in numerous combinations, typically queer bird (habitual criminal), queer cole (counterfeit money) and queer doxy (slattern). The use as a derogatory description of homosexuals did not begin until the 1920s, originating in the US and moving to the UK by the 1930s. Such combinations as queer as a nine-bob note or a threedollar bill and queer as a clockwork orange (Royal Navy, then gaining greater recognition with Anthony Burgess' novel Clockwork Orange [1962, film 1971]) followed in the 1950s. As well as the pig Latin eer-quay, queer has generated several examples of rhyming slang: shandy (chandelier: queer), Brighton pier, ginger (beer), King Lear, and jere (which rhymes with queer, but which, in the 17C, also meant both buttocks and a turd, and is thus allied to the various terms at buttocks and brown below.) Q stands for queer and K for the illiterate kweer. Of all the terms for homosexual, queer has generally been seen as the most abusive, although, in the same way that young blacks have started calling themselves 'nigger', turning a racist epithet back on itself, so have a number of militant homosexuals chosen to 'recapture' queer, notably in the US movement called Queer Nation, for their own uses.

Quean originally meant a woman; the term dates to the 11C, and soon afterwards became a term of abuse; by the 16C it most often meant strumpet or even whore. The spelling queen, and the link to homosexuality emerged in the early 20C; since then quean has almost entirely vanished, while queen is reserved for older, ostentatiously effeminate gay men — the antithesis of the tough, unabashed image of homosexuality that has been promoted since the rise of the GLF in the early 1970s. Synonymous terms are grand duchess and the Australian rhy. sl. haricot (haricot bean: queen). A closet queen or queer is a homosexual who, due to a persistent, allbeit marginally diminished atmosphere of hostility to homosexuality, prefers not to admit to his sexual preference. To come out of the closet, or more usually to come out, is to abandon such reticence.

A variety of terms based on fruit – fruitcake, fruiter, fruit-fly, fruit-plate, tooti-frooti (AA) and possibly frit – all stem from

the earlier meaning of the term: a woman of easy virtue. Such a woman was seen as 'easy picking'. The use of such terms as pejoratives for homosexuality was a simple transference given the necessary homophobia.

Bugger, the accepted SE term for sodomite since the 16C, is not strictly slang, although its use in a number of combinations is. Bug (18C and incontrovertibly slangy) is defined as one who incites others to sodomy. Bugger itself (1555) comes from the French bougre (1340), which in turn originates in the Latin Bulgarus, a Bulgarian, a name given to a sect of heretics who came from Bulgaria in the 11C. The term was transferred to the Albigensian heretics, who it was believed were largely homosexual. The term has also been applied to to usurers, while in 19C UK it meant a stealer of breast-pins (bugs) from drunks. Terms allied to bugger, and meaning homosexual, include bunker, burglar, and budlibudli (which in 20C India means sodomy). It also remains common as a general term for a man, especially in such combinations as silly bugger, daft bugger and the like.

#### **EFFEMINACY**

Despite 25 years of gay activism, the predominant image of homosexuality remains one of effeminacy, and the majority of the slang underlines this assumption.

So, one of those or that way are or were well-established euphemisms, while nance, nancy-boy, nellie or nelly, jessie, belle, mary, ethel (fr. Ethel Merman?), daisy, and betty are all quite obvious: they are girls' names, as are the 'flowers' lily, pansy and buttercup. Flower itself means homosexual, as does girl. Femme, foxy lady, bitch, butch, (US 1930s, UK 1950s, also applied to 'masculine' lesbians), auntie, doll, femme, mother, daughter and sister are all 'women', albeit of various ages and degrees of outrageousness. Swish, shim (fr. shimmy:to wriggle, or from she-him), broken wrist, limp wrist, lightfoot, yoo-hoo boy, fancy-pants and flit all refer to the exaggerated mannerisms of many queens. Bananas implies softness (and perhaps phallicity) as do quince and twiddlepoop. The stage offers Dorothy's

friends (the Dorothy in question being she of *The Wizard of Oz*, played by Judy Garland, a major gay icon), and omee-polone (fr. Parlyaree, and literally meaning 'man/woman'). Similar are he-she, hesh, himmer (him-her) and she-man. Others terms include sweet (AA) and sweetie, three legged beaver (a combination of third leg\*: penis and beaver\*: vagina) and lavender or lavender boy; lavender has long been considered an 'effeminate' colour, although the word originally meant a pawnbroker who 'laid things up in lavender'. To act effeminately is to camp, camp about or camp it up, to foop, poof about, ruin, swish or wreck; effeminate is la-di-dah.

## THE BUTTOCKS

Progressing from theory, as it were, to action, a number of terms are based unequivocally in sodomy, presumed to be the primary gay sexual activity. The somewhat ponderous inspector of manholes (20C, based on 19C inspector of pavements: a person in the pillory) is accompanied by the infinitely brisker arse bandit, arse-king and the punning aspro (ass-pro), battyman (West Indian, fr. batti: buttocks), boy-ass, bufu and buttfucker, rimadona (punning on both prima-donna and on ream, meaning sodomise) bum-boy, chutney ferret, dung-puncher, tan tracker, turd-burglar, turd-packer, hitchhiker on the Hershey highway (fr. the US Hershey chocolate bars), shirt-lifter (Australian), wind-jammer, fart-catcher, dirt tamper, pillow-biter and Turk (fr. the alleged national propensity for sodomy).

A small group of terms use the national stereotype of the classical Greeks, where homosexuality did not suffer the taboos of modern, Christian Europe. These terms include Greek culture (anal intercourse, usually in homosexual advertisement; Greek as used on a heterosexual prostitute's 'bill of sale' means the same thing), to Greek (to engage in pederasty), Greek love or the Greek way (pederasty), the Greek side (gay use) the buttocks, Irish by birth but Greek by injection a male homosexual; low Greek is heterosexual intercourse; 'high' Greek uses the anus —the vagina is 'lower' down the body).

The anus is further featured in a number of terms based on brown, ie., brown artist, brown family (1910), browning family, browning sisters, brown hatter (and hat) and brownie. Deadeye dick and eye doctor see the anus as an eye. Finally, still based on sexual practice, though on fellatio rather than sodomy, come cocksucker, blow-boy, lapper, skin-diver, catch and receiver (both punning on baseball terminology; logically the pitcher takes the opposite role), gobbler and dicky-licker (fr. dick\*: penis). The meathound and cannibal also 'eat meat' while the mouser and muzzler (fr. muzzle\*: mouth) nibble the penis, like a mouse at cheese. Larro is backslang for oral (sex).

#### **GENERAL TERMS**

The word homosexual gives homo, homie (as opposed to homey meaning homeboy\*), four-letter man (usuually s-h-i-t; here h-o-m-o, cf. five letter woman: b-i-t-c-h). The view of homosexuality as perversion is implicit in bent, freak, kinky, genderbender (1980s, exemplified by the Culture Club singer Boy George, for whom the term was coined), off-colour, secko (Aus., also a heterosexual child molester), third sexer, and funny man (AA). A boy, baby, capon or chicken all imply a young man, whether or not an actual prostitute, while wolf, twank, twink, and tonk refer to his older counterpart. Jock and boxer (punning on the two kinds of underwear) describes the young man and his older friend. Midnight cowboy, from the film of 1969, is a male whore, although the cowboy in question specialized in women. A trick is a prostitute's client, as he is in the heterosexual world. Gear or gearbox refers to one's genitals, while orchestra (which also means testicles) and flute or fluter (both meaning penis) add a 'musical' touch; the former will allegedly perform 'anything with anyone'. Hock, otherwise confusing, may be rhy. sl. for cock\*. Dyna is short for dynamite and thus rhymes with catamite. Oscar comes from Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Skippy (AA) may be a twist on skibby, used by US forces to describe Oriental prostitutes.

Further terms include waffle, angel, bag, buzzer (US), con (US), flyball (US), joyboy, kisser, mintie, mo, mola and nola, nic nac, pato (Spanish), undercover man and willie.

#### SPECIFIC TERMS

There are a wide selection of specific homosexual types, all of whom have gained their own particular title. They include auntie, chickenhawk, chicken queen, dirty dowager, grand duchess, john, mother, mother ga-ga, Mother Superior, your mother (older men); belle, bronco, butterbox, chicken, cornflakes, daughter, debutante, ga-ga, lamb, pogue, poggler, tender box, tail, (novice or youngster); husband, pitcher ('masculine' homosexual); bitch, wife, catcher ('feminine' homosexual); peek freak, peer queer, watch queen (voyeur); cousin, gazooney, possesh (older man's young lover), show stopper (a particularly attractive boy); body lover (homosexual frotteur), rim queen (one who practices anilingus); top man, bottom man (the dominant and passive partners in a sado-masochistic couple), privy queen, tearoom queen (one who solicits in lavatories): body queen (one who prefers body-builders); ill piece (an unattractive man).

Brilliant (an ostentatious queen); drag-queen (one who dresses as a woman), oncer (promiscuous male, never repeating a partner); uniforms (members of the armed or uniformed services); sea food (sailors); rough trade (genuine or fantasising 'proletarian' sexual partners); size queen (one who prefers large penises); golden shower queen (one who enjoys urolagnia); toe queen (foot fetishist), felch queen (scatophiliac); angel with a dirty face (one who dare not reveal his homsexuality); breeders (married homosexuals who father children); kid simple, pee-pee lover (one who prefers very young boys); jam fag (one who is devoted only to sex); sister-act (a homosexual couple, or a homsexual man copulating with a heterosexual woman); payoff queen (one who prefers to pay for sex); jam and straight (a non-homosexual male); pretender to the throne (one who poses as homosexual for his own purposes).

#### **GAY SEXUALITY**

Aside from the many terms that simply mean homosexual, or which specify one's preferred activities, slang offers a number of words dealing phrases with varieties of gay sexuality. The majority come from the American gay sub-culture that existed pre-GLF.

These include debut (one's first gay experience); mother-love (a gay man's relationship with a heterosexual woman); the bambi effect (for a young gay male to turn to heterosexuality); squelching (sex without affection). To hide one's homosexuality is to pass, to stay in the closet, or to wear a mourning veil. To wear a cut-glass veil is to fail to hide one's homosexuality. To lose one's gender is to abandon homo- for heterosexuality.

To become homosexual is to turn the corner while to reveal one's homosexuality is to come out, to discover one's gender, drop one's beads, drop one's hairpins, lay it out, learn a new way, wear one's badge; to be brought out is to be initiated into the gay life, while to out is to reveal another person's homosexuality, especially if that person does not wish it. Decades of persecution underpin turn the tables: for a homosexual to blackmail a heterosexual. A more literal self-revelation, that of the genitals, is to take one's meat out of the basket.

## **VENEREAL DISEASES**

## GONORRHOEA

For three and a half centuries, from its coinage in the 16C to the onset of Victorian verbal prudery in the mid-19C clap, meaning venereal disease in general, but gonorrhoea in particular, was SE. Henceforth it entered the realms of the taboo, where it has remained. Of uncertain origin, clap is believed to have come from the Old French clapoir, meaning bubo, and thus clapoire or clapier: a place of debauchery and the illness one can contract there. It remains the most widely used of all VD-related terms.

Other include cold in the dong (20C, possibly punning on 'cold in de dose'), and the rhy. sl. horse (19C, horse and trap, although horse can also mean crap\*: excrement). Other general terms include noli-me-tangere, (Scotland 17C, from the Latin: 'don't touch me'), the 18C haddums, an abbreviation of the punning phrase 'been at had 'em and come home by Clapham' (18C), Venus' curse, (19C), the whites (a vaginal discharge), nine day blues (20C, incubation period for gonorrhoea) and blueballs (testicular swelling, usually attributed to sexual frustration, but here as disease). A case of gonorrhoea is a dose or a load (both 19C).

The primary symptom of gonorrhoea in men is the pus-like discharge. Gleet, redolent of almost onomatopoeic imagery, has existed as its slang description since the 18C. Like clap, it comes from Old French, in this case glette, meaning slime, filth, purulent matter; according to John Palsgrave (d. 1535) in his L'Esclarcissment de la Langue Francoyse (1530) the 'frothe of an egge' or 'gelly of any thyng that congeleth'. Similar terms include the drip, dripsy or dripper (17C) the stick, (1880, either from the stickiness of the discharge or stick\*: the penis).

Aside from the discharge, gonorrhoea hurts. This pain, or aching, has created a number of other terms: the Barnwell ague, (17C), winter coals, (19C, which keep one 'hot' even on a cold day)', Covent Garden and Drury Lane ague (17C) and (Covent) Garden gout (19C). Crinkum and crinkums (1618, also found as grincombe) come from the SE term for anything full of twists and turns; 18C slang also has crinkum-crankum as the vagina. Pain is also underlined in fire and flame (19C), as well as the glimmer and the glim (19C, both from the old cant glim: fire); finally goodyear (17C) possibly comes from gouge: a soldier's drab.

## **SYPHILIS**

Although it is commonly used to denote any form of venereal disease, **pox** (16C) should properly be applied only to syphilis, a disease characterized by 'pocks' or eruptive pustules on the skin. Like clap it survived as SE until the onset of verbal prudery, in **pox's** case somewhat earlier, in the 18C, since when it has been off-limits

in 'polite' speech and writing. Nonetheless like clap once again, it has lasted the linguistic and historical course, engendering on its way a variety of combinations such as pox doctor (20C, venerealogist), poxed (17C, diseased), poxy (20C, in which the disease element is lost to a more general perjorative); got up like a pox-doctor's clerk (20C) means dressed nattily but in poor taste. The exclamations Pox on't! and Pox take you! can be found in Shakespeare; they too joined the world of taboo by the mid-18C.

The pox, perhaps due to its virulence and the concomitant need to blame it on some external agency, threw up a number of national names. First come the 16C Spanish needle, Spanish pox, Spanish gout, reflecting the role of Spain as the current national enemy; by the 18C Spain had been replaced by France, thus generating such terms as Frenchman, French crown, French goods, French gout, malady of France, French pox, French disease and French pig (a bubo). Frenchified (17C) meant diseased, and knocked with a French faggot described one whose nose had been lost through the disease. The Naples canker gives the nod to Italy, never an enemy but, like France, envisaged as an exotic hence 'dirty' - land. Only the Scotch fiddle (17C) remains something of an anomaly. Pox has created three examples of rhyming slang: band in the box (20C), Nervo and Knox (two members of Crazy Gang, music hall stars of the 1930s and 1940s), and jack (Aus., fr. jack-in-the-box).

Other terms for syphilis include **scabbado** (17C, an Spanish-ised version of SE *scab*), **measles** (20C), **the pip** (16C, Philip Stubbes, the Puritan pamphleteer warned in his *Anatamy of Abuses* [1583] 'Beware the Spanish pip'), **syph**, **sypho** (Aus.). A case of both syphilis and gonorrhoea is a **full house** or a **double event**.

The pox or pocks themselves, the venereal bubos, have their own lexicon. Terms include the marbles, (19C, possibly from the French morbilles: small blisters), the French pig, the Winchester goose (16C, the popular brothels of Southwark came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester), scalder, shanker (chancre), blue boar, (18C, possibly from the Blue Boar Tavern, sited in London's red light district) and blue boy (18C).

### TO BE INFECTED

Terms for having contracted VD include jacked up (20C Aus. from jack in the box), to be one of the knights (20C, gay use), to cop a dose or get dosed up (20C), to piss broken glass, to ride the silver steed and to take the bayonet course (all 20C), all of which imply the pain involved, as do the 19C to be burned, to pass through the fire, to be hot, to burn one's poker and to be in for the plate and win the heat. A fireship (17C) is a diseased whore, while a fireplug (19C) is an afflicted young man.

To give someone else the disease is to tip the token (18C, token meaning a sign of disease, tokens being SE for plague) and to burn (16C). Those who suffered took a cure of blue butter (mercurial ointment) at the powdering tub or at Mother Cornelius' tub. This name of this tub, literally the tub in which the flesh of dead animals was pickled or 'powdered', was extended to the sweating tub used in the 16C for the cure of venereal disease.

# **MASTURBATION**

'The good thing about masturbation', the writer Truman Capote once observed, 'is that you don't have to dress up for it.' And however strident and minatory the threats against what was once dismissed as 'self-pollution', it remains a primary human sexual activity. And as in the case of all such activities, the slang terminology is legion. It also, as in so many sexual activities, appears linguistically as an almost unreservedly male activity. This is surely speciousbut slang, echoing Queen Victoria's alleged refusal to acknowledge the existence of lesbians, persists in its blinkered ways.

## **MASTURBATION**

Aside from the present participle forms such as **jerking off**, tossing off and many others—the relevant verbs can found below—there are a number nouns for masturbation.

The baldest is probably hand job (20C), although, like fingerfucking and touching up (when the object is a woman) the implication is of a second person, administering the relevant stimulation. The verbs to milk and to fetch mettle (both 17C, fr. mettle: semen, 'the mettle of generation') have the same image of mutual, rather than solitary pleasure. Hand shandy and handgallop, however, are more personal, as are jerking the gherkin (one of a number of variations on jerk off, q.v.) and the j/o (fr. jerk off) scene. The lonely art (20C) and the soldier's joy (19C, otherwise describing, in the Royal Navy, pease pudding) underline the assumption that most masturbation is a solitary pleasure. Solo performance further points up the one-legged race, one off the wrist and one-stick drum improvisation, while there is a certain literary tone to Onan's Olympics, based on the story of Onan, who 'cast his seed upon the ground' (Genesis xxxviii.9). Pocket pool is sporting, and as such linked with variations on play with oneself\*, while slaking the bacon and whizzing the jizzum (fr. jizzum: semen) are unashamedly auto-erotic. Pawpaw tricks (which one 'plays') come from the 19C paw-paw meaning naughty (with its image of pawing the sought-after person), while the racial stereotype of mean-ness gives the Dutch husband or Dutch wife.

Rhyming slang offers four popular terms: J. Arthur (fr. J Arthur Rank [1888-1972], the flour magnate turned movie mogul), Levy (fr. Levy and Franks, the firm of restaurant and pub proprietors), Jodrell (Jodrell Bank) and Barclay's (Barclay's Bank). All rhyme with what, in the UK at least, is the best known term for masturbation: wank, originally spelt whank and dating to c.1870. Its etymology remains frustratingly mysterious: the best guess would appear to be echoic. Finally the hand, usually essential to the activity, is personified as Five-Finger Mary, the five-fingered or drymouthed widow, four sisters on Thumb Street, Lady Five Fingers, mother fist and her five daughters, Mrs. Palm and her five daughters, Rosy Palm and her five little sisters and Miss Fist. The only exception to this feminine parade is a corporal and four (19C, the thumb and four fingers, which one 'mounts', as in mounting a guard).

Finally mutual masturbation is either a circle jerk or playing chopsticks.

#### TO MASTURBATE

The essence of masturbation is rubbing, and it is logical that the earliest slang for the verb to masturbate is **frig** (16C, from the Latin *fricare*: to rub). **Friggle** is a defunct 19C version; **frig** itself has survived but almost invariably as a euphemism for **fuck**\*, thus frigging around, etc. **Rub up**, (19C) is a direct descendent, while **diddle** (19C) is cognate with **fiddle**.

Given the supposedly pleasurable, but for many years vilified outcome of masturbation, one can but assume that deep-rooted guilt lies behind the violence of so many of the images that are conferred upon its slang synonyms. **Bob**, (19C) has roots in a variety of dialect terms meaning variously to hit or strike lightly; to poke or push through or, in the sort of pun that emerges so regularly in 19C slang, to toss. **Claw** (19C) usually means to beat while **shag** (19C, now meaning only to copulate) means shake and the 'dash' in **dash one's doodle** (19C, thus **doodle-dasher**: masturbator) is the same 13C SE term that means to smash violently or to break in pieces.

There are whole groups of violent combinations, all banging, flogging, pounding, pulling and the like. Among them are bang the bishop (19°C, Partridge suggests from the resemblance of the penis to a mitre, or to the eponymous chess piece), beat one's little brother, belt one's hog, flog one's mutton, flog the dolphin, flog the bishop, flog the dog, flog the log, hack one's mack, beat off, beat one's dummy, beat one's hog, beat one's meat, slam one's hammer, slam one's Spam, slap one's wapper, spank the monkey, spank the salami, whip it, whip one's dripper and whip one's wire. Equally aggressive are choke the chicken or choke the chook (both 20°C Aus.), pound one's pork, pound one's pud, pound one's flounder, pull one's joint, pull one's pud or pudding, pull one's taffy, pull one's wire, pull about (all 19°C), pull the pope, thump one's pumper, wonk one's conker, yang one's wang, yank

the yam and yank one's crank. Best-known of all, coined in the 18C and now the US equivalent of the British wank, is jerk or jerk off, with such combinations as jerk one's jelly or jerk one's juice (18C), jerk one's mutton and jerk one's turkey (19C) and the 20C consult Dr. Jerkoff.

The assonance that permeates a number of those terms is found again in the less violent crank one's shank, dinky one's slinky, file one's fun-rod, fist one's mister, flex one's sex, flick one's bic (AA), hump one's hose, please one's pisser, prompt one's porpoise (and wax one's dolphin), prime one's pump, tickle one's pickle and feel in one's pocket for one's big hairy rocket. The well-known toss oneself off (18C) gives a number of similar 'off' phrases: work oneself off (16C), and various 19C coinages: get one's nuts off, jack off, jerk off, do oneself off, play off, rub off, whip off, whack off, flip oneself off (Aus., thus flipwreck: one who supposedly masturbates to insanity), pump off or work off. Bring up or bring off by hand are both 16C, possibly only in a transitive sense, i.e. exciting a partner.

The auto-erotic aspects of masturbation, all of which are essentially developments of play off (18C) and its descendent play with oneself (19C), give a wide range of images. Playing gives play pocket billiards or pocket pool, play the male organ and play a flute solo on one's meat whistle. Lark (19C) is a slang synonym for play, just as it is an SE one. Among the wide range of synonyms are clean one's rifle, grease one's pipe, unclog the pipes, polish one's sword, shine one's pole, run one's hand up the flagpole, varnish one's pole, do a dry waltz with oneself, haul one's own ashes (fr. 20C get one's ashes hauled, to have sex; ashes is presumably fr. ass\*), milk the chicken (cf. choke the chook), paint one's ceiling, fight one's turkey (cf. turkey neck\*: penis), fuck one's fist and fist-fuck (cf. the 20C gay use), mess about (19C, usually as take liberties with), sling one's jelly or sling one's juice (19C), burp the worm, butter one's corn, strike the pink match, prompt one's porpoise, prime one's pump, prune the fifth limb. point one's social finger, shoot the tadpoles (fr. the tadpolelike sperms), stir one's stew, stroke one's beef, stroke one's

poker, stroke the dog, twang one's wire and tweak one's twinkie.

Less personal are box the Jesuit and get cockroaches or eat cockroaches (16C, mixing a pun on cock\*: penis with a general loathing of Jesuits), shake hands with the wife's best friend, sew (20C AA, cf. 18C needle\* meaning penis), shake hands with the guy who stood up when I got married, handle (19C), keep down the census (19C, also meaning abort) walk the dog and watch the eyelid movies (fr. one's masturbation fantasies).

As suggested above, slang barely acknowledges female masturbation, but there is a small lexicon. Once again, violence underpins many of the terms. The 19C has digitate (19C, cf. finger-fuck) and tickle one's crack (19C). Contemporary terms include beat the beaver (beaver\*: vagina), buttonhole, clap one's clit, cook cucumbers, grease the gash, hide the hot dog (cf. hide the salami\*: copulation), hit the slit (slit\*: vagina), hose one's hole, make waves, pet the poodle, slam the clam and stump-jump. To catch a buzz is to masturbate with a vibrator.

## **PROSTITUTION**

Neither prostitute (fr. the Latin prostituere: to place before, expose publicly, offer for sale) nor whore (fr. a variety of north European languages in which the cognate terms mean adulterer, and before that from an Indo-European root qar- which can also be found in the Latin carus: dear, the Old Irish cara: friend and the Lettish kars: lascivious) were ever slang. But the 'oldest profession' (coined by Kipling as 'the most ancient' profession in 1888) has accrued a wide slang vocabulary over the years and given its near-taboo status, virtually every other word allied to the job is.

## THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The first use of bitch (a female dog since 1000) as a derogatory term appears c.1400 and as such it was swiftly extended to meaning

a whore; that meaning clung for two centuries, returning to a merely generalised slur c.1600. Only in the US pimp culture does it still mean whore. Baggage, first used in this context by Shakespeare in The Taming of the Shrew (1596) followed a similar course; twenty years later, in Middleton's play A Chaste Maid in Cheapside it meant merely a saucy young women. Another Shakespearian term was filth (the 17C has fen, with similarly rank overtones), and equally antagonistic synonyms included puttock (SE: a bird of prey, the kite or buzzard; the 18C offers the similar carrion), the barber's chair (fr. the phrase 'common as a barber's chair', and an antecedent of the modern town bike), a barrack hack (available to anyone who wishes to 'ride') a precursor of the 19C garrison hack (although this also meant no more than a regular attender at military balls), a hobby horse (which is 'ridden') and the coldly disinterested commodity (which prefigures the 19C article). A hilding came from the SE meaning a contemptible, worthless person of either sex; a good-for-nothing.

Other general terms include hedge-creeper (a low whore, from hedge: a generic term for inferior, dirty), jay, kat or kate (Scots dial.), ladybird (bird as whore resurfaced briefly in the late 19C but only the general meaning, woman, has lasted, especially as revived in the 1960s). A mermaid referred to the sirens of Greek myth, beckoning men to their doom, Maid Marian came from the Morris dancing tradition of having that character played by a local strumpet, and an occupant worked in an occupying house\* or brothel. The use of punk as whore is the first ever use of the word in English; it appears in 1596, in Wits Miserie and the Worlds Madnesse: Discovering the Devils Incarnat of this Age by Thomas Lodge (1558-1625). Staunchly defiant of any etymology is skainsmate. Used in Romeo and Juliet: 'Scurvie knave I am none of his flurt-gils I am none of his skaines mates' the context seems to indicate a prostitute, but the cautious OED admits only 'origin and exact meaning uncertain.' One interpretation might be skain means skein, as in skein of thread or wool, and thus relates to the 'sewing' imagery of intercourse (cf. needle woman\*).

The close relations between criminal vagabonds and the whores who accompanied them gives a number of terms: the autem mort

accompanied a ruffler\* or an upright man\*; from autem\*: church and thus, if only in name, a 'married' woman), doxy probably came from the Dutch docke: a doll, a bawdy basket doubled as a hawker of obscene literature, a trull (fr. the synonymous Ger. trulle) almost immediately entered SE. Mort or mot meant both woman in general and whore; it came either from the Dutch mot-huys: a brothel (lit. woman house), but later claims associate it with the French amourette: little girlfriend; a walking mort was a tramp's companion who often worked as a whore.

Mutton (which gained the additional meaning of copulation and of the female genitals) and laced mutton both meant whore, leading to the 18C old ewe dressed as lamb and the 19C mutton dressed as lamb; the mutton walk was the junction of Coventry Street and Windmill Street in the West End of London - a crossroads well-known for its whores; a twigger, from SE meaning a vigorous and prolific breeder, a term originally used of a ewe. A young or even virgin whore was a dell (who became a doxy once she had been broken in, often by her first lover and exploiter, the upright man\*), while the green goose was young and innocent and the puzzle came from the French pucelle: a virgin. A guineahen punned on the girl's price as did hackney from the 14C hackney horse which, like its namesake, was available for hire. Other terms originated in clothes: a stammel or strammel was defined as a lusty strapping wench, especially one who wore a stammel: a coarse woolen petticoat, white apron referred to the garment that for a while was a 16C whore's 'uniform' (the 17C had the similar waistcoateer) and tiffity-taffety to tiffany and taffeta, transparent silks used for dresses. A loose bodied gown referred both to the garment and to the loose coat game: copulation.

Finally come terms which while in context mean whore, may also, with that prejudice which, far from abated, still confuses the self-determined woman with a tart, simply mean an independent woman: lioness, polecat (referring both to the notoriously aggressive animal and to pole\*: the penis), a ramp or rampager (fr. rampant: exhibiting fierceness or high spirits), randy-dandy or ranty-tanty (fr. rant: a spree and thus giving on the ran-dan: out on a spree and randy: sexually excited), a rude girl (where

rude means boisterous; some four centuries before its modern, Black use) and a **Shoreditch fury** (fr. a tough area of London).

#### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

If Shoreditch was London's centre for whoring in the 16C, then Bankside in Southwark had joined it by the 17th and a Bankside lady was now a prostitute. Indeed its reputation went back much further, as Weinreb and Hibbert characterise it in their London Encyclopedia (1983) 'with its numerous brothels and bear-baiting, the area...was for long one of medieval London's main centres of dissipation.' Also known as Stew's Bank (fr. stew\*: a brothel) it contained an unconsecrated graveyard where the corpses of the hapless whores were unceremoniously deposited. Under the jurisdiction of the Bishops of Winchester (thus Winchester goose\*: venereal disease), Bankside was, but for a brief period of morality and temporary closure under Henry VIII c.1546, London's leading 'red-light area'. It lasted as such until the 18C when the game moved to Covent Garden and the 19th when the Haymarket became whoring's HQ. Another geographical label is Whetstone Park deer or Whetstone Park mutton; the term comes from Whetstones Lane which ran between Holborn and Lincoln's Inn Fields and was 'famed for a nest of wenches'. The whore, or at least the promiscuous young woman as a deer persists into the 19C when it can be found in The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green (1853). Another animal is the bat, giving the 19C on the batter: working as a prostitute, and derived from the image of whores plying for trade like bats fluttering in the twilight. A Spital whore referred both to Spitalfields, another tough East End area, and to SE spital: a hospital, thus underlining the physical perils of whoring. A Scotch warming pan was an obliging chambermaid.

17C terms are many and varied. Buttock, a prostitute, gives a number of combinations: the buttock and twang or buttock and file (a whore and pickpocket team), the buttock broker: a brothel keeper, and going buttocking or buttock-banqueting is working as a whore; a buttock and tongue is a shrewish woman and a buttock-ball is either a dance attended by whores or sexual

intercourse. Blowze and bloss both began as meaning a beggar's companion, and generate the 18C blouzalinda and blouzabella; blowen comes from the Romany beluñi: a sister in debauchery, while blower, with similar roots and equally derogatory, is the specific opposite of the complimentary jomer: a girlfriend (either from Romany or Parlyaree). More foreign origins can be found in bona and bona roba (fr. the Ital: a fine dress), a Dutch widow (17C), a vroe or vrow, which becomes froe in the 18C (all from the Dutch vrouw: a woman), a case vrow (either fr. pintle-case\*: vagina or casa: house, thus giving the phrase go case with: to have a relationship), the euphemistic quaedam (Latin: a certain woman) and quicumque vult (Latin: whomsoever wants) and the scolopendra or its anglicised peer the stingtail; both terms originating in the sting in a scorpion's tail; as defined in the OED's 17C citation the scolopendra was 'A fabulous sea-fish which feeling himselfe taken with a hooke casteth out his bowels vntill hee hath vnloosed the hooke and then swalloweth them vp againe'. The 18C cockatrice continues the association; the mythical cockatrice (first used in the 14C) being a serpent identified with the basilisk and said to kill by its mere glance and to be hatched from a cock's egg. The possibility of such a 'sting' was underlined in fireship (a diseased whore) although brimstone simply meant 'hot stuff'.

Further synonyms include dolly, a development of the 16C doll, and a forerunner of the 19C dollymop (an 'amateur', often a milliner or 'governess') and the 20C dolly or dollybird (to neither of whom prostitution was imputed); rig, rig-mutton and rigsby, gamester and wench of the game (thus the 19C on the game, which can also mean thieving), bobtail, brown Bessie (later, perhaps by association, a musket, otherwise known as the 'soldier's best friend'), bulker (a low harlot who sleeps on a heap or bulk) buss beggar (fr. buss:kiss), carry knave, light lady, light frigate (punning on frig: to copulate), pinnace (fr. SE: a light vessel in attendance on a larger one) and land carrack (fr. SE carrack: a large ship), flesh broker and flesh peddler (the terms also meant marriage broker; thus the spiritual flesh-broker: a parson) and a she-napper. Proper names give nanny (a popular name), florence (fr. Northants. dial: one who dresses untidily), Madame

Van (perhaps an actual madame or brothel-owner), maux or mawkes, both of which derive from malkin, itself a variation on Matilda, the ironic Puritan or pure (the 18C has impure), a common Jack or common sewer, and flirt-gill or gill-flirt (fr. gill: a wanton wench), and the 19C Flirtina Cop-all. Placket-lady refers to placket\*: vagina, thus giving placket-stung: venereally diseased; an open-arse was originally a medlar, trillbye comes from trill: the anus and treddle from tread: to have intercourse; niggler is based in niggle, also meaning to copulate.

The earlier commodity is echoed in convenient, natural and its converse peculiar; crack refers to the vagina and tit or willing tit to the breasts; prugge is possibly based on prig, in its meaning of haggling over a price. A fling-dust is a street walker as is a girl about town; a suburban or suburban wench plies the suburb trade (see Brothel for further combinations); light o'love was euphemistic, miss verged on SE, mob came from the 16C SE mab: a slattern, moll, molly and mollisher prefigure the 20C US gangster's moll (although whoring was no longer directly implied); pug is possibly a development of punk\*, soss-brangle comes fr. soss: a slut, tweak is from the SE to twitch, and trug and trugmoldy are linked to trugging house: a brothel.

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Whoredom had shifted its focus by the 18C, moving north across the river from Bankside and centring on Covent Garden and adjacent areas of the City and West End. Thus the Covent Garden nun and the 19C Covent Garden lady, the market dame (referring both to her 'wares'; and presumably to her pitch at Covent Garden market), a Drury Lane vestal, a Fleet Street dove or Fleet Street houri, a Fulham virgin and, as a general term, Haymarket ware. The 19C added St John's Wood vestal, referring to the north London suburb where so many gentlemen established their mistresses. Tail, meaning the vagina (although it could also mean the penis and the buttocks) which has already been found in bobtail, reappears in bangtail (still current among US Blacks), tickletail, wagtail and flashtail and the 19C cocktail; a

squirrel was so-called because, according to Grose 'like that animal she covers her back with her tail' and nature also appears in tib (also a generic term for women, the opposite of the male Tom and as tib of the buttery\*: a goose; cf. green goose\*), the game birds (possibly an unconscious pun on the game: prostitution) a partridge, a plover, a pheasant and a quail; plus a canary or canary-bird; a game pullet was a young whore, although the contemporary 'Game Chicken' was the prizefighter Harry Pearce, the lady of the lake or laker lady appears 'natural' but in fact reflects the theatrical slang lake: to play amorously (probably from lark); a star gazer like a hedge whore\* lay on her back in the open air; a dragon referred to St George's vanquished opponent, although it also punned on ride a St George: for the woman to mount the man, as does rantipole, which echoes the phrase ride a rantipole, meaning the same thing.

An abbess and presbyteress both ran brothels, while a nun worked there; although nunnery is used in Hamlet, two centuries earlier and the term may thus possess a far older, if undocumented pedigree. An academician also worked in a brothel or academy; a term later extended to mean a thieves' kitchen. Other 18C terms include the demi-rep or the 19C demi-mondaine, a relatively classy whore, and a figure defined by Henry Fielding in Tom Jones (1749) as one 'whom everybody knows to be what nobody calls her'; rep itself was an abbreviation (as it is today in street gang usage) of reputation, although some have suggested the word thus shortened is reprobate.

Drap comes from the SE drab: a slattern; the term is linked to the synonymous Irish drabog or Gaelic drabag but there is no hard evidence as to which influenced which; it may also be linked to Low German drabbe: dirt. Dirtiness also underpins bunter, originally a woman who scavenged for rags in the street; and latterly used as a general term of contempt. A jack-whore was big and tough while a piece (still extant although with no obvious inference of whoring) gives the doubly punning toast: 'May we never have a peace that will injure the Constitution'. A rainbow dressed in brightly variegated colours, a dasher was a flashy whore while a wife in water colours derived either from the image of colours

fading as do the passions of the newly married or from the idea that the loving (if hired) whore was less strident than an intolerant harridan of a wife. A dopey was a contemporary version of the beggar's trull\*, the piper's wife was Scottish while the public ledger was 'open to all parties', a strum either abbreviated strumpet or referred to the strumming of a tune or playing of an 'instrument'; a woman of all work was servant who could be seduced, while the woman of pleasure or woman of the town was a whore pure and simple, as was the giglot, giggler or goglet, the good girl and the easy virgin or easy virtue (fr. easy: compliant). A wriggler was linked to the wriggling pole\*:a penis and the verb to wriggle navels\*: to have intercourse; necessary in the plural meant the genitals while one of my cousins and one of them (subsequently used to imply homosexuality) were strictly euphemistic.

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Classical allusions pervade 19C language, and the slang is no exception. Euphemisms for prostitutes include Thais, Phrynne (a 4CBC hetaera or courtesan) and Aspasia (19C, the 5CBC mistress of Pericles and a friend of Socrates); cyprian, meaning literally belonging to Cyprus, refers to the island's worship of the goddess of love Aphrodite or Venus while paphian recalls Paphos, the city in south-western Cyprus, where it is claimed that Aphrodite was born; dromaky (Northern dial.) comes from Andromache, wife of the Trojan hero Hector, and referred to the poor reputation of the travelling actresses who played her in Euripedes' eponymous play, while, still in the theatre, the use of Hector to mean pimp underlines the image; Columbine is Harlequin's mistress. Similarly euphemistic, if not so literary are laundress, a perfect lady or a real lady, a summer cabbage (one picks it when it is young; the term also meant umbrella or parasol), a soiled dove and an unfortunate, a term that may well be based in a misreading of Thomas Hood's poem 'The Bridge of Sighs': 'One more unfortunate/weary of breath/rashly importunate/gone to her death'. A Pickthatch vestal recalls the 16C go to the Manor of Picked

Hatch or go to Picket-Hatch Grange, itself referring to the pickt hatch or a hatch with pikes, commonly used as a brothel-sign. The original such address was a tavern-cum-brothel in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell. Similar term are to go to (Saint) Paul's or to go to Westminster for a wife.

Clothing informs such terms as the dress-lodger who is dressed in finery by her landlady and repays the favour by walking the streets and turning over her profits; a cotton top attempted to present a respectable image despite her actual profession; the term refers to a particular type of stockings of which the lower, visible portion was silk, but the remainder was cheaper cotton; a bit of muslin, a bit of stuff, a bit of fluff, a bit of fish, a bit of calico and a bit of skirt all meant a whore; other clothes-related terms were flash piece, flash mollisher, flash girl and flash moll (all meaning a showy dresser), lift skirts or light skirts, a needlewoman (fr. needle\*: penis) and sempstress; smock-servant, smock-agent and smock-piece are all based on smock, generic for female debauchery; thus smock-alley: the vagina.

Military life gives the ammunition wife (who was 'hot stuff', as is a warm 'un; an ammunition leg was a wooden leg), a brevet wife (punning on the SE brevet: an acting unpaid rank); a doublebarrelled gun and a fore and after prefigured the 20C two-way girl: in all cases describing a girl who was agreeable to group sex, involving vaginal (fore) and anal (aft) intercourse. Two fer appears to be similar, possibly 'two for the price of one'. Street walkers numbered among them the cruiser, the hunt-about, the sparrow (who does a 'flutter', cf. bat) the curbstone sailor, the flagger and the flag-about (fr. flag: pavement); noffgur came from the Yiddish nafka, which in turn came from an Aramaic term meaning street-walker. Like the barrack hack anyone could 'ride' an omnibus, while the older guineahen had become the onicker (fr. the price: one nicker\*: one pound); a threepenny uprighter is notably further down the market, a cab moll either works literally in cabs and trains or possibly from a cab: a brothel; the lone duck or quiet mouse is a brothel prostitute, as is a panel, parnel or tender parnel (all from the panel house\*: a brothel where customers are robbed). Mrs Lukey Props was either a tramps' companion or a madame, while hooker, one of the longest lasting of all such terms, comes from New York City's 19C brothel area, Corlear's Hook. Night-workers include the flybynight, moonlighter (a good century prior to its current use, shorn of sexual overtones, but still smacking of illegality), the nightingale, noctress, nocturne, night-bird, night-cap, night-shade, night poacher, night-snap, night-trader and night-walker; the owl comes out at night as does the evening star. Pross or prossy is the most obvious of abbreviations and rory, from Rory O'Moore: whore; it could also mean a floor.

Terms alluding to the genitals include pinch-prick, pinch bottom, pintle-bit, pintle fancier, pintle maid and pintle ranger (all from pintle\*: prick), pole-climber and prick-climber, rabbit pie (fr. rabbit or live rabbit: the penis; thus the rabbit-pie shifter: a policeman), foreskin hunter, receiver general (punning on the official title of the receiver of public revenues), rigol (fr. SE rigol: a watercourse or furrow and thus the vagina), shake and shake-bag (possibly fr. shag\* and also meaning vagina), split arse mechanic (cf. open-arse), split mutton (cf. mutton), treble cleft (fr. female physiology), bum-worker, holer (fr. the 13-15C holour, a fornicator or whoremonger and as such applied to men only), nestcock and nestlecock (fr. nest: vagina). Tail, tailist, tail-trader, tail-worker, and the punning tenant in tail all refer to tail\*. Merry bit, merry-arsed Christian and merry legs take the positive view of whoring as do pleasure-lady and pleasure-merchant and the nautical Jack's delight (fr. Jack Tar: a sailor). Rump and screw are both from verbs meaning to have intercourse while scrudge comes from scrouge which in turn means squeeze. Fuckstress is maximally basic as is poke, while put is from the French putain: a prostitute.

Upper-class terms included the euphemistic anonyma, incognita and pretty horse breaker (punning on rider); an artichoke was debauched old woman: spiky on the outside but still tasty within, while a graduate was 'a spinster skilled in sexual practise' and a flapper (the predecessor of the relatively neutral 20C usage) a very young harlot as was a kid leather (fr. kid: a child and leather: vagina; thus kid stretcher: a paedophile). A shoful-pullet (fr.

shoful\*: counterfeit money) is a fake virgin, much prized in contemporary brothels, and a virgin pullet is 'a young women who though often trod has never laid' (cf. tread). Burerk or burick comes either from the Romany burk: breast or the Scots bure: a loose woman; the latter is presumably linked to bewer or buer (fr. the Shelta term for a girl) although this term has no implications of prostitution. Chauvering donna and chauvering moll come either from charver: to copulate, itself from the Romany charvo: to rub, although claims exist for the French chauffer. to heat. Gay girl or gay woman are examples of the earlier, hetersoexual use of gay\*.

Some form of relationship underpins pillow-mate, ligby and loteby (fr. lig: bed, and thus a bedfellow), palliasse (fr. the straw bed upon which one lies), bed-fagot (cf. Scots warming pan), bed-presser, fancy-fagot and straw fagot (all from faggot: woman, cf. baggage), poll and polly (fr. Mary = Moll = Poll; thus to poll up: to live together) and spoffskins (a whore who pretends to temporary marriage). A Sunday girl is a weekend mistress (cf: Sunday man\*, weekend ho). Derogatory terms include wrong 'un, badger (the badger is nocturnal and carnivorous; thus the badger game: robbing or blackmailing a client) and cow. The naughty pack and the synonymous naughty dickey-bird are similarly uncomplimentary. Jam is short for jam-tart and synonymous with tart; sweetmeat is synonymous.

More 19C terms include a fly-girl (fr. fly: artful, cunning and streetwise), a gook (possibly from gowk: a tramp), hair (fr. the generic term for women viewed as sex objects, thus the term hair to sell: to be willing to offer sex), hen or hen of the game, hiver (US) from the image of whores 'swarming like bees' to the newly settled Western towns, a hop-picker or hopping wife, a left-handed wife ('left' always meaning dubious or illegal), a jerker (fr. jerk: accost), jude or judy, kittie and maggie (all fr. proper names), kiddley-wink (the origin of the non-sexual kiddy-wink) a nit (Scots dial), a particular, a purse-finder and a shikse, shakester or shickster (19C, Yid. all from the Yiddish shikse, a gentile girl, itself derived from Heb. sheques: a blemish).

### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

With hooker, still probably the most common name, already a century old, the 20C has relatively few general terms for whore, although the specifics are legion. Tart, tartlet and the backslang trat, terms which had previously been primarily affectionate, took on a more pejorative meaning; hooker was abbreviated to hook (US), while the business side of the sex took pride of place with the euphemistic working girl, pro (short for professional woman rather than prostitute), business girl and the blunter ass peddler. Today's sex industry worker is merely PC euphemism, not slang. The decline of the brothel and the vast expansion of girls working from their own flats gave call-girl. Older terms included brass, which stems from the rhy. sl. brass nail: tail\*, and is still widely used, and the pre-Sexual Offences Act division of Edies (working the cheaper areas of London, notably the Baze - Bayswater Road the East End and the railway stations), and the Toms, who concentrated on the carriage trade of Mayfair. Edie has vanished, although tom, now bereft of any class connotations can be found in the Metropolitan Police jargon: the tom patrol (surveying and arresting street prostitutes), known in the US as the pussy posse.

Australia has offered a number of indigenous terms: prosso (using the -o suffix found throughout the nation's slang), princess and pavement princess, charlie (fr. the rhy. sl. Charlie Wheeler = sheila = girl), chromo and its abbreviations cro or crow. all of which come in turn from chromolithograph, a picture printed in colour, and thus referring to the prostitute's supposed penchant for an excess of makeup, grunter (fr. her -faked -groams of pleasure), KP (common prostitute) and Mallee root (rhy sl: prostitute; a mallee is small eucalyptus, also found in such phrases as fit as a Mallee bull). Afro-Americans have ho (the quintessential Black term for whore, a literal transliteration of the way that word is pronounced), hoowah, stepper (fr. stepping out), stick, open game and, harking back to an earlier era, bird.

Other terms, mainly from the US, include a ragtime girl (US), on the same lines as jazz: sexual intercourse; shortheels and roundheels (US, although both are equally likely to mean merely

promiscuous), a troll (cf. trull\*), a cruiser, a flatbacker (who only offers missionary position sex), a kurve (Yiddish, and thus from Hebrew: a strange woman who approaches too close), puta (fr. Spanish), a short-time girl and the heavily humorous industrial debutante (who specialises in business conventions).

More specific terms cover the part-time or semi-amateur girl: a B-girl (fr. bar-girl), a sitter (US, who sits in a bar), a charity moll (Aus., who 'gives it away'), a chippy (19C, possibly fr. 'cheapie'), a half-brass, and a weekend ho, a weekend warrior and a summertime ho (all AA; cf. Sunday girl, summer cabbage). An ageing prostitute is an old timer or a vet while a worn-out girl is fleabag or an over the hill ho (AA). An incompetent, who fails to net her share of clients is a flaky ho, a hold-out (the inference is she is deliberately not trying), a mudkicker (otherwise a racehorse that gets stuck in the mud), a nag (usually an old horse) and a slouch; an outlaw is a girl who works without a pimp). For a US pimp an experienced prostitute is his bottom woman (the implication is of solidity and dependability; the term echoes the 18C bottom), main bitch, star of the line, rose among the thorns, a share certificate (an 'investment'), or, to maintain the racetrack imagery, a thoroughbred. A girl who robs her clients or, more foolishly, her pimp is a ginger (fr. 20C ginger: to rob, used by whores since the 1930s) or a rip-off artist. Finally an under-age prostitute is a baby-pro or sweetmeat (cf. 19C use). More recent terms are **pretties** (new young sex objects whether male or female), twinkies (also a US sweet) and chicken (children ripe for sexual exploitation) and, most chilling of all, kleenex: you use them once and throw them away; to sparrowhawk is to pick up homeless youngsters (of either sex) for sexual exploitation, typically runaways who have just arrived at rail or bus stations; it comes from the predatory bird of the same name; a chicken hawk is an older gay man who prefers sex with teenage or younger boys.

### MALE PROSTITUTES

The majority of terms for almost invariably gay male prostitutes either echo their female peers - call boy, puto - or incorporate

a variety of terms meaning penis with those meaning trader or seller — dick peddler, prick peddler. While the practise of male prostitution is obviously as old as its female equivalent, the image of homosexuality has been (and in many ways remains) such that even slang has steered clear of making reference to it. The main heterosexual term is gigolo, formed c.1920 as a masculine version of the French gigole: a tall thin woman and hence a woman of the streets or public dance-halls. Such a man, as the Woman's Home Companion put it in 1922 was one 'who lives off women's money...a gigolo, definitely speaking, designated one of those incredible and pathetic male creatures, who for ten francs would dance with any woman wishing to dance in the cafs, hotels, and restaurants of France.' From there he moved on to greater intimacies, and would live, a male version of the mistress, on his new friend's money. The toy-boy of the 1980s is his descendant.

Otherwise the terms are universally homosexual. Perhaps the definitive reference to money and transience is rent (1930s) and its later development, the rent boy (1970s). Both terms spring from the 19C renter, although such figures were not whores as such, but preferred a more casual relationship, swapping sexual favours for 'presents', whether in cash or kind. Other 'economic' terms include ass peddler, ass pro (cf. pro), business boy, COD (the punning 'cock on delivery'), career boy, coin collector, commercial queer, crack salesman, pedlar, trade and working girl. Sexually descriptive terms include bird taker (bird: penis), buff boy (buff: naked), cocksman and cocktail (cf. female use), floater (19C meaning penis, although it might also come from his 'floating around') and two-way man. Ambiguous sexuality is underlined by broad boy (broad: a woman), he-whore and puto (fr. Spanish, cf. puta). Further terms include bunny, with its implications of promiscuity (is it only coincidence that the fictional Raffles, the epicine 'Gentleman Cracksman' has as his intimate male companion, one 'Bunny' Manders?), come-on boy, fag\* boy, foot soldier, goofer (its etymology is obscure, but there are possibly, punning connections to the early 20C Royal Navy slang goofer: a bumboat), Hollywood hustler (underlining Middle America's fascination with Hollywood as a modern Babylon),

party boy, sport and sporting goods (fr. sport, a general term for raffish lowlife) and trabajado (fr. Spanish: 'worked over'). To work as a male prostitute is to hawk one's brown (fr. brown: the anus, cf. Brown family\*, Browning Family\* etc.) and peddle one's arse. A hand gig is a male prostitute who masturbates his client or joins in mutual masturbation (gig comes presumably from the modern rock n roll meaning of performance, but may be personal, echoing the 17C gig: a wanton, flighty girl).

### **WORKING AS A PROSTITUTE**

Those whose profession is prostitution work the pussy game or the game, indulge in fancy work (19C), or go on the game or on the batter, on the battle (Aus.), on the bottle, trolling or stepping (both AA). To be on the case is to be earning steadily from one client, the phrase either comes from go case: to have a relationship, or from the police-orientated be on the case, with image of getting on with a job. To work the cuts is to work on the street rather than in a brothel. The prostitute's invitation to a passing client is wanna do a thing? or wanna go out?. The act of selling one's body is to hawk one's fork (Aus., fr. fork: crutch), hawk one's mutton (19C, mutton: vagina) or hawk one's pearly (20C); hawk one's meat, however, was merely to display one's body, synonymous with the 19C air the the dairy: to expose the breasts. Hook is the verb form of hooker\*, peddle pussy is self-evident and sit on one's stuff and step both Afro-American. Git-down time is the start of a working day (one 'gits down' to business) and to break one's luck is to meet the first client of the day. To do the milk route is to tour bus stations or other such places late at night or very early in the morning looking for trade.

The primary US term is to turn tricks and trick is a central term in US prostitution. It appears to combine the 17C use of trick to mean sexual intercourse, and as such paralleled by the contemporary prank and toy (all found in Shakespeare), with the 19C US cant term meaning a burglary; the original use of turn a trick was to accomplish a successful robbery. Trick has created a whole mini-vocabulary of its own. A trick is not only the sexual encoun-

ter but the client as well, thus the abbreviation **TOS** (trick off the street); a **champagne trick** is a generous client, probably a regular one, a **straight trick** requires no 'extras' beyond normal intercourse while a **freak treak** demands a variety of refinements, some of which may be potentially dangerous. A **trick baby** is a prostitute's client-fathered child, a **trick suit** is a dress that can be removed easily and is thus suitable for business and to **beat a trick** is to rob a client. With the advance of the gay subculture into mainstream metropolitan life during the 1970s, **trick** took on a secondary, overtly gay meaning: a trick was a youthful companion, the equivalent, perhaps, of the 19C **renter**.

Earlier, 19C, terms include to range (possibly from ranger: the penis), to tread one's shoe awry (with its respectable opposite, to tread one's shoe straight), to go sparrow-catching, to walk the Piazzas (of Covent Garden), to take a stone up in the ear (fr. stone: a testicle), to go on the town and to get up to tricks (tricks used here euphemistically, rather than in the US sense). To pick up a flat (fr. flattie: a dupe) is to meet a client; to do a bit of flat is to have sex. The quasi-amateur status of some 19C whores, typically the dollymop\*, gives the phrase to work for one's living and do the naughty for one's clothes. US prostitutes working for a pimp are variously his flock, nest or stable.

# **PIMPING**

## THE PIMP

While **pimp** has been SE for probably three centuries now, it started off as a slang term, probably based on the French *pimpreneau*: a scoundrel. Other influential 16C French terms were *pimpant*: alluring or seducing in outward appearance or dress and *pimpesouée*: a pretentious woman. Pimp, however, was soon absorbed into the mainstream language and a wider slang vocabulary took over. **Knight** and **squire**, both of which can be found in a variety of combinations — in all of which they mean simply devotee or

practitioner — give apron-knight, apron-squire, apple-squire and squire of the body. Apron, like smock\* means simply woman, albeit with an inference of promiscuity, while apple, although debatable, very possibly refers to the female breast. Monger, another term implying expertise or at least interest in, gives apple monger and mutton monger (mutton\* meaning vagina). The similar tug-mutton can also be found as the root of the Etonian tug, meaning colleger or scholar, and comes from the tough meat which was apparently the constant diet of such pupils.

The 17C gives bully, a term that for the next two centuries rivalled, if not actually replaced pimp and its peer ponce as a term for what SE defined as a pander. Its etymology is obscure: possibly coming from the Dutch boel meaning a lover (of either sex); the term can also mean brother. There may also be a connection with the German buhle: a lover, which can also mean a friend or kinsman. Writing in 1721 the lexicographer Bailey defines boolie as beloved, and calls it 'an old word'. While bully no longer means pimp, the man's role as the 'heavy' in a brothel is undoubtedly linked to the modern bouncer or bruiser. Other 17C terms include brother of the gusset (gusset: vagina), a led captain (who could also be a sponger or toady), or a cock-bawd (literally a male whore). The 18C adds captain, flash man (flash being a general purpose description used for the criminal underworld) and pimp whiskin or whisking, meaning a first-rate pimp, although whisk usually meant the derogatory whipper snapper).

Of the many abiding myths to be created in modern assessments of the 19C the idea of the paterfamilias at home and the whore-monger abroad remains one of the most potent. Certainly the easy availability of female flesh made 'pay as you play' one of the truest 'Victorian values'. And if prostitutes abounded, so did their pimps.

Pensioner, cunt-pensioner and petticoat pensioner all came from the French pensionaire, meaning lodger. The terms have long vanished, but with another defunct pair, the pouncey or pounce-shicer, they lead on to the far more common, and still extant ponce, which would appear to come from the pronunciation of pensionaire. Pounceys flourished at the mid-century, Henry Mayhew talked of 'The "pounceys", (the class I have alluded to as

fancy-men,'in his London Labour and the London Poor, vol III. (1861), while ponce appeared perhaps a decade later. It promptly created a pair of rhyming slang terms: Alphonse (a nod to French stereotyping, although the French also used the term, in their case taking it from the Spanish Alphonso) and Charlie Ronce. There are many synonyms. Fancy man, fancy cove and fancy Joseph come either from the French fiance, or from the Fancy, the generic term for the contemporary sporting fraternity. Kiddy, a small-time pimp, came from the same 'fast', semi-criminal world. Mackeral (fr. the French maguereau, which came in turn from the Dutch makelaar, both of which words meant pander) had meant pimp since the 15C. Abbreviated to mack in the late 19C, it had crossed the Atlantic, and flourished there, especially amongst the Black community. It survives today, alongside mack man and macaroni (both AA), although the link with the 18C use of macaroni (refering to the Italian foodstuff rather than the French ponce) to mean dandy is purely coincidental, if nonetheless pleasing, given the pimp's abiding taste for extravagant adornment.

More blatant descriptions included fucker, rumper, holer and holemonger, meat merchant, gamester (also the whore), and ribald. The all-purpose smock (cf. apron) gave smock servant, smock pensioner, smockster, smock-merchant, smellsmock and smock tearer; what had once euphemistically been termed the 'sport of Venus (love-making) gave sportsman and sport, sporting house (a brothel), and in fiction the celebrated pimp 'Sporting Life'. Other pimps were an abbot, an abbot on the Cross or a croziered abbot (the male version, logically, of the abbess or female brothel-keeper, more generally known then and now as a madam), Cupid, a faker, a twat-faker or twatmasher (fr. twat: vagina, and masher, fr. the Romany masher-ava: to entice), a flower-fancier, a pinch-bottom, pinch-buttock or pinch-cunt, or a knight of the petticoat. A rounder (US) toured clubs and bars, touting for trade, while stringer (fr. string along: to deceive) emphasised the duplicity of the operation. Pimping as a noun was sawneying, literally soft soaping.

The Sunday man was so-called because Sunday, the day she had off, was the only day he was willing to appear in public with his

girl, while Haymarket Hector and prosser both came from names for whores. The former from Haymarket ware (working girls had long established London's Haymarket as the centre of their metropolitan activities) and the latter from pross, an abbreviation of prostitute, although the Gaiety Theatre's celebrated Prossers' Avenue, the bar where the more raffish elements of society were wont to promenade, came from prosser: an idler or sponger, although the pimp element must have had some influence. Hector, from the Trojan hero, was an all-purpose term for hero, however ironically. The jack-gagger (US) was married to his whore, while kaffir came from the Arabic kafir infidel. The derogatory description of South African blacks comes from the same root.

The 20C has stallion (also the customer) and town stallion as well as town bull and town rake. Rhy. sl. has Joe Bonce and Joe Ronce as well as the Aus. silver spoon, rhyming with hoon, the national term for pimp. A further Aus. term is fence, a new twist on the UK use of the term as a dealer in stolen goods. A bit of mess is a whore's lover: neither a proper pimp nor a client.

Many of America's most successful pimps are, and traditionally have been black. Thus the much of the 20C terminology comes from that community and does not appear in the UK. In that world any pimp is a player (used generally as a smart operator in any form of business); a small-time pimp is a simple pimp, a chili chump or chili pimp, a popcorn pimp or a coffeeand pimp (a description stemming from the US theatrical term a coffeeand role: a role which pays so badly that the best the actor can expect is enough money to buy 'coffee and' cakes). Other specialised terms include boss player (a superior pimp); faggotter (a pimp for male prostitutes, from faggot\*); gorilla pimp (a violent pimp); promoted pimp (an experienced, senior pimp); sugar pimp and sweet pimp (a kind or at least non-violent pimp); macaroni with cheese (a pimp who has other interests).

## ACCESSORIES AND LIFESTYLE

This same world has engendered a wide vocabulary for describing the pimp lifestyle. That world itself is known the Life or mackery

(fr. mack). Pimps work from the Book (a verbally transmitted 'book of pimping rules'). Anything pertaining to pimping is mack.

The office is wherever a pimp conducts business; the fast track is the centre of whoring in a city, and the cities of America's East Coast in general; the slow track is the West Coast cities. Bonds are clothes given to his prostitutes; copping clothes are the 'best suit' used when enticing a new girl into his stable of hos; kimible is the noticeable 'pimp walk'; a pimp's arrest is the revocation of statutory bail bond the pimp has put up for each girl: if a girl wants to leave the pimp can simply cancel the bond, rendering her liable to instant and punitory arrest; pimp dust is cocaine; pimp fronts are any pimp-style clothes; a pimp ride is the expensive car that proclaims his, or his girls' success; pimp shades and pimp tints are dark glasses while a pimp stick is a homemade whip, made from a straightened wire coat hanger.

To entice prostitutes is to cast the net, cop, cop for, hit on or take an application while to work as a pimp is to drive one's hos, put (one) on the block, put (one) on the corner or turn (one) out. To cop and blow is to exploit a prostitute; to lock is to ensure a prostitute's fidelity; to work from a book is to run call- not street girls (the book in this case is a 'little black' version in which the names of regular clients are kept). UK pimps ponce off their girls. To discuss pimping is to run down game or talk game, to file is to give instruction to a prostitute); to rig a jig is to prepare a sexual con-trick; to put snow in one's game is to ensnare a white person for financial gain; to creep is to defraud a client and to drop a lug is to confront or argue with. In Aus. to work a ginger is to rob a client.

# **BROTHEL**

While the word brothel is and always has been standard English, it is, if not slang, then something of a misnomer, since brothel in its original, 14C usage meant simply a disreputable person, of either

sex. A century later the disrepute had overtaken the individual, and brothel meant first and foremost a whore; it was not for another century that, as an abbreviation of 'brothel's house' or 'brothel-house', that it replaced the person with the place. Meanwhile there already existed a perfectly good word for brothel: bordel, from bordar—a feudal term meaning the owner of a hut or cottage, which in turn came from the Latin bordarius (cottager) and hence from, borda (a cottage or hut). Bordel vanished from popular use as brothel took its place, but bordello (late 16C), meaning the same thing, is still in use, a conscious mix of the exotic and the archaic.

### **HOUSE**

The euphemistic house has stood for brothel, whether as a terse monosyllable, or in a variety of combinations. The American madame Polly Adler entitled her memoirs A House Is Not A Home, and both Bob Dylan and the Animals essayed the old folk hit The House of the Rising Sun. In neither case did the knowledgeable overlook the reference. House emerges in the 19C, often as a 'house of blue light' or a 'house of ill fame'. Its roots, possibly, lie in the French maison de tolerance. That said, combinations of house appear much earlier.

The 16C brings occupying house (fr. occupy\*: to have intercourse) and trugging ken, (trug: a low prostitute; in 1703 trugmolly meant a whore). The 17C has vaulting house (1605), punch house (c. 1696; punch meant to have intercourse, specifically to deflower a virgin; it is used today as an Afro-American term for a place where pimps and whores meet; punch is also found in the modern bunch-punch: a gang rape) and garden house (see also at suburb below). This last comes either from Covent Garden, a notably louche area — there might actually have been a specific inn named the Garden House — or from garden meaning female pubic hair. House of accomodation and house of civil reception were coined in the 18C, as were leaping house, (18C, leap: to have intercourse), coupling house, nugging-house / ken (nug: to copulate) and kip (18C, from Danish kippe: hut; the use of kip to mean sleeping place is 19C).

The 19C, with the fullscale entry of Americanisms into the slang lexicon, introduces yet more 'house' terms: barrelhouse (US originally a saloon, literally a house with a barrel), benny house, call house (fr. call girls), cathouse (cat\*: whore or vagina), juke joint (juke: to copulate, in the Southern states), a bawdy-house, bawdy ken (or bodikin) or smuggling-ken (smuggle: to caress), touch crib, fancy house and bed-house, (although this was more a short-time hotel than a fully-fledged brothel). The old cant word flash (denoting crime in general since the 17C) gave flash drum, flash house, and flash ken, (all of which originally meant a criminal lodging house, before becoming a brothel), hook house (US, from hooker\*: whore), mot house and mot case (mot, from the earlier mort, meant woman, case, from the Italian casa meant house). Twentieth century terms include a leaning house (AA), a rap parlour (euphemism for 'massage parlour', itself a euphemism, in many cases, for a brothel, cf. rap); peg house and show house both meant a homosexual brothel.

Specific terms include the **panel-crib** and its synonym the **badger-crib** (19C). Such brothels were home to the fraudulent 'badger game': this entailed the ensuaring of a client by the girl, and his subsequent robbery, either by her or, more often, by her pimp, posing as an 'outraged boyfriend'. The earliest 'badgers' were 'a Crew of desperate Varlets, who rob and kill near any River, and then throw the dead Bodies within' (New Canting Dictionary, 1725); by 1889 a **badger** was a pimp or brothel-keeper and subsequently a blackmailer. The 'badger game' was so named in the mid-19C, though it undoubtedly flourished much earlier.

Perhaps the most satisfyingly subversive 'house' euphemism is the 19C house in the suburbs. Due, perhaps, to the reputation of the then quintessentially suburban St John's Wood as a place where a man could set up his mistress at a decent distance from his respectable West End family home, 'suburban' had become, as Farmer and Henley put it, 'generic for disorder and loose living'. Allied terms include suburb trade (prostitution), suburb wench (a prostitute), suburb garden or garden house (the house where one's mistress was kept, or, to quote Farmer and Henley once more, a 'private fuckery').

### SHOP

The essentially mercantile aspect of prostitution can be seen in the variety of terms using the suffix shop, or some other form of sales place. These include molly shop, (c.1900, fr. molly\*: whore), nanny house or shop (17C), whore shop (19C), hook shop (US) —in all of which cases the qualifying noun meant a prostitute. Other terms all stem from the commodity on sale, whether intercourse or, crudely, the vagina: bumshop (19C), buttocking shop or ken (early 19C), cunt-shop (19C), grinding shop (19C), knocking shop or (rarely) knocking house (19C), flesh market, fish market and fish pound (mid-19C, fr. fish\*:vagina), green grocery (mid-19C, from greens\*: intercourse), meatfancier's (19C), meat-house (both fr. meat\*: vagina) and buttonhole factory (19C); meat market, while occasionally signifying a brothel, can also simply mean any form of pickup place, irrespective of whether money enters the sexual equation. Finally comes the bread and butter warehouse (18C). This meant specifically Ranelagh Gardens in Chelsea, built as a pleasure garden in 1741. It featured a large roccoco rotunda, a Chinese pavilion, booths for gentlemen to smoke and places for drinking, eating and socialising. At its peak Mozart played there, Canaletto painted it and Edward Gibbon termed it 'the most convenient place for courtships of every kind - the best market we have in England'. It was the last aspect that caused its downfall. Whether the slang nickname came from the Garden's tea rooms, or from the fact that bread and butter fashion meant copulation is debatable; probably the one punned on the other, but whatever the etymology, Ranelagh Gardens gradually fell into disrepute. It was demolished in 1803 and is now part of the gardens of Chelsea Hospital.

## SCHOOL

The last and briefest, though generally earliest mass category of brothel terms involves school: academy (17C, where worked academicians), finishing academy, cavaulting school (17C, from cavaulting: copulation, from the Lingua Franca cavalta,

riding, itself rooted in the Latin caballus: horse), vaulting school (17C), ladies' college (18C) and pushing school (18C).

### **GENERAL TERMS**

General terms for brothel, falling outside the major categories include case (from Italian casa: house, although case\* could also mean vagina) and vrow-case (fr. the Dutch vrow. woman), hummums (19C, from the Arabic hammamm, a hot or Turkish bath; the original hummum was set up in Covent Garden in 1631, it later became a hotel; hummum is reminiscent of another SE term for brothel: bagnio, also meaning bath), cab (19C, probably from cabin), Corinth (17C, from the allegedly lurid reputation of the ancient Greek city), nunnery (17C, from the nonariae, the Roman harlots, and best-known today from Hamlet's command to Ophelia: 'Get thee to a nunnery' [Hamlet, III, i]; nun, therefore meant a prostitute and both terms somewhat undermine the 19C slang image of incongruity: 'like a nun in a knocking-shop'), Covent Garden nunnery (18C, plus Covent Garden abbess: a madame or procuress, and Covent Garden nun: a whore), warren (17C) and cunny warren (18C, cunny: vagina, plus a pun on SE bunny), fuckery (19C), girlery (19C), place of sixpenny sinfulness (19C, a suburban brothel) and chicken ranch (US 20C, based on the original Chicken Ranch, a licensed brothel).

Brothel areas include the stews, and the 20°C ho stroll (AA; ho: whore), pitch, stroll. bricks (thus 'working on the bricks') and track. Red light area comes possibly from the late 16°C when a red lattice\* meant a tavern sign and thence if the tavern was thus inclined, a brothel; red grate also meant an inn or brothel. Gropecuntlane, cited by the OED as the earliest printed use of the word cunt\*, and sited at the heart of London's City stews, presumably left few visitors in doubt as to its primary commodity.

Madames, who ran brothels, include a Covent Garden abbess (18C) or plain abbess, Bankside ladies (17C, who could also be the whores themselves, see PROSTITUTION for Bankside etymology), mother (18C, only a whore in 17C), mother midnight (18C, which also meant a midwife), mother damnable (19C),

mother of the maids (18C), Mrs Lukey Props (19C, also a tramp's companion), wafer-woman and house mother (20C).

## RACE RELATIONS

In the world of slang race relations are invariably difficult: at best suspicious, at worst outright hostile and inevitably laden with stereotypes. Terms for certain specific national groups are listed elsewhere; this section deals with the black (and brown)/white divide. The bulk of such terms are of 20C coinage; this is less a tribute to the tolerance of earlier centuries, than testimony to the prior invisibility of blacks within a predominantly white culture.

## **BLACKS (BY WHITES)**

Blacks began appearing in Britain during the 18C, usually as sailors who had decided to make their home in such port cities as Liverpool, or as servants brought home by merchants and explorers, and their existence duly impinges upon contemporary slang. Aside from such heavily 'humorous' terms as snowball, lilywhite and chimney chops (all 18C, the latter pair of which had earlier meant chimney sweep) the first 'modern' term to enter the language is nigger, which appears during the late 18C. Taken from the SE negro which had appeared (via the Spanish negro: black) in the mid-16C, it was used among others by Robert Burns and Lord Byron before crossing the Atlantic and taking its place as what is still the most widely used of such racial epithets. Although primarily attached to that section of the US population imported as slaves and now known as Afro-Americans, nigger, especially in the UK, was used for any coloured race, e.g. the Indians encountered by the soldiers of the Raj, Australian Aborigines, various African tribes and so on. Almost contemporaneous is darkie or darky, another English coinage, which migrated to the US c.1840.

More lasting terms emerged during the 19C, almost all of them US in origin. Sambo (c.1800) was taken from the Spanish zambo,

used to describe those of mixed Negro and Indian or European blood; that the term also described a breed of yellow monkey and may have been the same word as that meaning bandy-legged merely underlines the gut racism that informs such language. The US use, however, may have a different root: the Foulah sambo:uncle; the suggestion by Farmer and Henley of a third root, an African tribe the Samboses (for whom they claim an appearance in a text of 1558) has no validity. Like darky (which smacks of the music hall) three other terms are redolent with the popular exploitation of blacks as figures of fun. Rastus, probably an abbreviation of the name Erastus, can be found in a number of songs (and subsequently Hollywood movies) in which the 'typical' black is seen as subserviently stupid, more of a dog than a human; the name also shares the billing for a series of 'Rastus and Liza' jokes, predicated on the same stereotypes. Coon (c.1860) is an abbreviation for raccoon and the 'chocolate coloured coon' (usually a white person in blackface) was for years a staple of mass entertainment, typically as in television's Black and White Minstrel Show, Unlike other such terms coon had a non-racial meaning: slightly earlier (c.1832) it described any man, especially a sly and shrewd one; a further meaning, c.1840, was of a member of the old US Whig party, which for a while had the raccoon as its emblem. By the late 19C the meaning was unequivocally racist, and used as such in Australia too, where it described not blacks but Aborigines. It also generated three rhy. sl. phrases: egg and spoon, harvest moon and silvery spoon. Finally Jim Crow, based on the 'nigger minstrel' song (first performed c.1832 by Thomas D. Rice [1808-60]) with its refrain 'Wheel about and turn about and jump Jim Crow', came by the mid-20C to characterize not simply the individual black, but as Jim Crowism the whole apparatus of racist segregation that underpinned the government and society of the Southern states of America. The name Jim Crow moved to the UK where it described 'nigger minstrels', who, blacked up like their US counterparts, 'jumped Jim Crow' as part of their regular repertoire. The term picanniny, for a black child, comes from the Spanish pequeño or the Portuguese pequeno, both meaning small; the pejorative phrase a touch of the tarbrush, meaning of partially black

ancestry, is a UK coinage, although the term originally referred, in the Royal Navy, to an over-zealous officer (fr. his endless ordering of his men to apply tar to various parts of the ship).

The main UK contribution to this dubious lexicon in the 20C is spade, from the popular phrase 'black as the ace of spades' and coined in the 1920s. It is echoed in the rhy. sl. lucozade and razor (razor blade). It is, in fairness, perhaps the least overtly racist of any such term. The opposite of spade is jumble (fr. John Bull) a term supposedly used by London's black community during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is cited as such by the writer Colin MacInnes (although it is conspicuously absent from Partridge's DSUE which does have **spade**) but does not seem to have survived. Other UK phrases are chocolate (presumably from the colour, but possibly from rhy. sl. chocolate frog: wog\*), jungle bunny and chungo bunny, but for the remainder of the racist vocabulary, the palm must go to the US. Terms include dinge (fr. the 'dinginess' of black skin), shine and smoke (all pre-World War II), jig, jigaboo and zigaboo: terms that may draw on the alternative definition of jig as a dance, and thus based on the French giguer, to leap, gambol and frolic (the classic 19C black stereotypes) or modeled on bugaboo, which in the 13C was the name of a demon, and since the 18C, the fear demons in general. Boog, boogie and oogie either come from boogaloo, thus perpetuating the dance motif, or from bogey, which also refers back to bugaboo. Dark meat tends to imply black girls (thus the equivalent white meat) seen in a sexual context, eight ball refers to the black eight ball in the game of pool and groid is a collegiate abbreviation of negroid. Yiddish supplies schwartzer and schwartze (fr.. German schwartz: black) and schvug or schvugie (a mix of shwartzer and boogie and artificial, rather than genuine, i.e. European 'old country' Yiddish). Finally shadow, smut-butt, spook and stove lid all attest to the perceived 'darkness' of blacks.

Blacks in Africa hadtheir own description, although they too could be **niggers**. **Kaffir** (late 18C) meant literally a member of a South African race which in turn is part of the Bantu family. As such the term has long been used for any Black African. It was also used on the London Stock Exchange as a nickname for South

African mine shares during the late 19C; thus the Kaffir Circus: those stockbrokers who specialized in such shares, and the offices in which they worked. Other terms for Africans are the abbreviation Af or Afs, and munt, from the Bantu umuntu: a person, or a servant. White Australians too developed their terms for the indigenous population. Boong began by meaning Aborigine, although it has spread to mean any coloured person, including Asiatics. Din or more recently gin (both from the Dharuk diyin: woman, although coincidentally an abbrev.. of Aborigine) means a black woman, giving such terms as gin-burglar: a white man who has sex with Aborigine women (earlier versions included gin-masher, gin-banger, gin-stealer, gin-hunter and gin-jockey); their half-caste offspring are creamies. Opposed to such miscegenation is the gin-shepherd, who seeks to keep the races separate. Gin's piss is inferior beer, to be like a gin at a christening is to be ill-at-ease. Aside from US imports, which deal impartially with the West Indian, Indian and Pakistani populations, Britain has coined its own term wog, which is aimed specifically at Indians and Pakistanis, although it has been extended to cover any 'brown' immigrants, especially Bangladeshis and even the small group of Vietnamese. The term, which emerged during the 1920s, defies any accurate etymology, although F. C. Bowen states in Sea Slang (1929) 'Wogs, lower class Babu shipping clerks on the Indian coast', but provides no further detail; popular belief has always chosen the acronym WOG: westernized oriental gentlemen, while Partridge opts for what he sees as the simplest and most obvious root: an abbreviation of golliwog. Certainly this once-popular doll, with its caricatured 'black' features, has long since been marginalised as politically incorrect. As popular as, and something of a successor to wog is Paki or Pakki, an abbreviation of Pakistani but by no means restricted to actual Pakistanis. 20C US has yom or yomo, abbreviations of the common Black street phrase 'Your mother!'

## BLACKS (BY BLACKS)

If white terms for blacks are typified by their hostility, then black terms for themselves are mainly predicated on the need to reinforce the group, followed by a selection of terms which unlike the white vocabulary which is based on the theory that 'they all look the same to me', emphasizes the differences between individuals, especially as regards the degree to which their skin is actually 'black'. That said, these terms are all US and all 20C. Britain's black community has not developed so diversified a lexicon.

General terms include original and all-originals, black 360 degrees, bleed and blood (fr. blood brother) boot, brother and the brothers (coined by the revolutionary black groups of the 1960s), member, skillet, (early 20C, from the SE skillet: a black iron frying pan), speck and the most recent coinages: homeboy, homegirl and their common abbreviation homey.

A notably dark-complexioned black is a black bird, black dust, inky-dinky, midnight, smokestack and a zombie (originally a West African or Haitian snake deity, latterly a soulless corpse said to have been revived by witchcraft). Names for a light complexioned person include bright, buckwheat (the name of the black child in the movie series Our Gang), casper (fr. the television cartoon Casper the Friendly Ghost), grey (also used to mean a white man), suede, lemon (i.e. yellow or mulatto), pinkie and pinktoes (specifically a light skinned black woman). A Mulatto woman is a high yaller, high yellow, yellow ass or yellow girl. A rebellious, non-conformist black is variously a bad nigger or bad-ass nigger, a bad boy, a cut-throat, a field nigger (cf. yard nigger) or a hardhead, all of which terms play on white stereotypes and indeed terminology (esp. bad nigger), reversing the usual balance of 'good' and 'bad' (cf. wicked, bad). A subservient or middle-class black is an Uncle Tom, Tom, Dr. Thomas or Mr Thomas (all from the black slave Uncle Tom, pious hero of Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin [1852]), Aunt Jane or Aunt Jemima (the classic 'mammy' figure for whom a chain of pancake houses was named), a fade or faded boogie (who has metaphorically 'lost' his colour), handkerchief head (as worn by Aunt Jemima, but see hankiehead\*), a house nigger, HN or yard nigger (all based on the differentiation under slavery between the 'domesticated' blacks who worked as house servants. and those who merely toiled in the plantation fields). A shuffle

mocks the stereotypical shuffling, foolish darky, **seddity** (fr. SE absurdity) is specifically a black who attempts to ape whites and an **oreo**, like the chocolate-covered Oreo cookie, is black outside but white within. Other phrases include **John Henry** (fr. the song), a tough, hard worker despite the odds and **firsts** or **blockbusters**: blacks who are first to move into formerly all-white areas.

## WHITES (BY BLACKS)

As one might expect, the whiteness of whites provides some of the basic terms used when blacks are describing their opposite numbers: among such terms are blanco, chalk, gray, lily, paleface, pink and whitey. Cracker and Mr. Cracker are based on the 18C cracker, meaning natives of Georgia and Florida, and are synonymous with the phrase white trash; similarly crack-corn refers to white natives of Kentucky, and has been linked to cracker, although it appears some sixty-five years later. Poor whites are similarly apostrophized in peck or peckerwood, a reference to the red woodpecker, supposedly a symbol of whites, as opposed to the black crow, the emblem of blacks. Beast and devil testify to the white man as inherently wicked, as does yacoo, which comes from Yacub: the white devil-figure at the heart of Black Muslim mythology. The widely used ofay, with its abbreviations fey and fay, has generated a number of etymologies. The suggestion that the word is Pig Latin for foe is generally discounted as overly simplistic, while H. L. Mencken, writing in The American Language (1936), is taking an equally easy, but no more viable route in offering the French au fait: in tune with, aware of, as 'signifying mastery'. The OED opts for an African language: the question is which one? In 1932 the magazine Africa stated that 'The root of the word appears to come from the Ibibio Afia, white or light-coloured' while fifty-five years later a contributor to American Speech preferred the Yoruba ofe 'a charm that lets one jump so high as to disappear', and thus by extension the trouble which causes one to require such vanishing; that a West African tribesman facing the prospect of enslavement saw the white man as such a problem, and thus the essence of trouble, seems feasible. Less common are the

obsolete kelt (early 20C, from the SE celt?), rabbit, hay eater and the man with fuzzy balls. Honky or honkie comes from hunkie, a name originally given to the Poles and other immigrant Slavs who worked in the Chicago stockyards; it was transferred during the 1960s to any racist white who was seen as opposing black demands for greater civil rights. A superhonkie is an extreme example of the breed. During the 19C Mr. Charlie and his feminine equivalent Miss Ann were the generic terms for the white master and mistress; the 20C added Mr Peanut. In a non-US context the Rastafarians of Jamaica use ballhead (fr. bald-head, which, compared to their flowing dreadlocks, most whites, however hirsute, may be considered to be) to mean white. As well as the generic Miss Ann, white women have also been Miss Lillian, Miss Amy (Mr. Charlie's daughter), Little Eva and Lady Snow. Alternative terms include bale of straw (straw: blonde hair) pinktoes, silk, snow and white meat.

Other coloured groups have their own terms for whites. Mexicans offer gringo and gringa, both from 19C, as well as anglo: anyone of ostensibly Anglo-Saxon appearance and thus a white person. Aborigines have gubba, gubb, gub or Mr. Gub, Asiatics prefer the descriptive roundeye (a term adopted by US troops during the Vietnam War, especially when referring to white girls). American Indians characterize their fellows who yearn for assimilation as apples: red on the outside but white under the skin (cf. oreo) or Uncle Tomahawks (cf. Uncle Tom). Banana (yellow on the outside and white inside) fulfils the same function for the Chinese.

### OTHER GROUPS

Gypsies, rarely popular in the UK, have been variously termed diddicois or didekeis (fr. Romany didakeis: halfbreed gypsies), gyppos, and the fair gang (fr. their regular appearances at country fairs). Farmer and Henley (but no other authority) add mugger, which did exist in the 18C to describe a travelling hawker of earthenware, who, like many such travellers, might be considered a potential thief. Orientals are known as chopsticks, dinks, gooks (a term that in the 19C meant a prostitute, but in the 20C has always

meant a foreigner, whether Filipinos in the 1930s, Koreans in the 1950s or Vietnamese during the 1960s and 1970s), little people, ricers (fr. their supposed staple diet), slants, slits, slopes or slopeheads (all of which refer to the 'slanted' oriental eye) and, generically, as the yellow peril\*. Arabs, or more precisely Iraqis, became known during the 1991 Gulf War as towel-heads, ragheads, hankie-heads and sand niggers.

### **COGNATE TERMS**

As in any area where race determines the vocabulary, blackness carries with it a cognate vocabulary, in which such terms as African, black and nigger are combined to produce a range of almost invariably pejorative and stereotypical terms. Among them are African dominoes and African golf (craps dice), African engineering (shoddy, second-rate workmanship, cf. Mexican), the African Railroad (the San Francisco municipal bus line which is principally used by blacks); the Black Belt, Black Bottom, Black Town, Nigger Hill and Nigger Town the black area, whether or not a ghetto proper, within any larger town or city. Blackleg and black pencil are both a black man's penis while black bagging, black jack, black joke, black meat (also black women in general), black mouth and black Maria (which also means black prostitute) all mean a black woman's genitals. A blacksmith's shop is a brothel run by a black madame, a black bezer is a black person's face (cf. beezer) and blackplate is soul food (punning on the regular US restaurant dish, the 'blue plate special'). To let off a little nigger is to let off steam, to niggerlip is to wet the end of a cigarette while smoking it (a term known to the hippies as bogging), nigger bait is an excessive display of chrome on one's car, nigger daytime is night time, nigger heaven was synonymous for the theatre's gods, the highest and cheapest tier of seats, and that which is like a nigger girl's left tit is neither right nor fair. A Harlem credit card is a piece of hose used to syphon petrol from another car into the tank of one's own. A Harlem sunset is the heavily bleeding wound caused by a slash from an open razor.

The lowly image of America's Mexican immigrants is reflected in a similarly derogatory range of terms. Mexican itself means cheap, second-rate; to go to Mexico is to become drunk (for US teenagers brief trips across the border usually implied non-stop excess), a Mexican breakfast is a cigarette and a glass of water, i.e. nothing nourishing at all, Mexican green is a grade and type of marijuana and to fly Mexican airlines is to smoke it, a Mexican cigarette is a poorly rolled marijuana cigarette; a Mexican standoff is any situation in which neither party is willing to back down from a stated position but simultaneously neither party has a superior edge; the result is that both parties give in and walk off. The Mexican credit card is a synonym for the Harlem credit card\*, a Mexican Buick is a Chevrolet (fr. the respective status of the cars, the Chevvy being the lesser model), a Mexican carwash is washing the car by leaving it out in the rain, a Mexican muffler is a home-made silencer made from a tin can stuffed with steel wool which is then attached to the car's exhaust pipe, a Mexican jeep is a donkey and Mexican overdrive is free wheeling to save petrol (Jewish overdrive has the same meaning).

A Mexican athlete is an unsuccessful candidate for a college or school sports and a Mexican nose guard a jock strap or athletic supporter; a Mexican dragline is a shovel or spade, a Mexican jumping bean is an amphetamine pill, a Mexican nightmare or Mexican schlock is third-rate art, especially gaudy ceramic crockery, typical of that sold to tourists in Mexico; a Mexican promotion or a Mexican raise is a better job but one which brings no increase in salary; Mexican toothache and the Mexican two-step both mean diahorrea, often contracted on a foreign holiday (cf. Aztec two-step, Montezuma's revenge, etc.).

# THE JEWS

The Jew as a racial stereotype requires greater space than is available here, as do the arguments for or against the inclusion of any such vilifications in this or any other reference work. Anti-semitism boasts too lengthy and dishonourable a pedigree for discussion here: the status of the terms it inspires should be self-evident. As far as slang goes Jew equals money (with a spot of tailoring and an aversion to pork) to his gentile peers (unlike the Scot who may also equal money but is at least inventive and brave as well) and the words below bear this out.

## **JEWS**

Other than the opprobrious Jew-boy (19C), which was applied mainly, but not invariably to younger Jews, the core slang term for Jew was and remains Yid, with its occasional diminutive Yiddle, and the adjective Yiddish or Yiddisher. Taken from the German Jude, meaning Jew, and prior to that from Yehuda or Judah, one of the Biblical Jacob's sons, the term, as the writer Leo Rosten points out, is neutral if pronounced 'yeed' as it would be by Jews speaking the Judaeo-German language Yiddish, but unashamedly offensive if pronounced 'yid'. As is the way of such modifiers, Yiddish or Yiddisher, as found particularly amongst Cockneys, whose community lived side by side with many Jewish immigrants and their descendants, was and is relatively affectionate. Yid, tout court, is not. Calling Tottenham Hotspur FC, the Yids (fr. their supposedly large numbers of Jewish fans), is not meant as a term of endearment.

Slightly earlier than Yid came ikey or ikey-mo (c.1835). Both terms come from proper Jewish names: Isaac, and in the combination Moses too. Like a number of 'racial' names (by no means only those for Jews) the term while initially meaning only a member of the relevant race, was used to personify those with 'Jewish' characteristics. Thus ikey also describes someone seen as artful, crafty, knowing or 'fly', or one who has too high an opinion of themselves. Abe, abie and Abie Kabibble (all US) are similarly name-based, in this case on another Biblical figure, Abraham. Abie Kabibble comes from the phrase 'ish kabibble', meaning who cares, or don't worry, probably based on the Yiddish nish gefidlt. Adopted by the vaudeville superstar Fanny Brice the term was picked up by America's 'dean of cartoonists' Harry Hershfield who in 1917

launched a character called *Abie the Agent*, based on one 'Abie Kabibble'. Highly successful, the strip lasted until 1932. The term was further popularized by a swing trumpeter who adopted the name Ish Kabibble, and started performing as a comic.

Moch, mouchey and mockie (19C) come from Moses, although they may have some connection to what is probably the oldest if defunct term for Jew: smoutch, smouse, smouch or smous (all 18C) which derive from the Dutch smous and the Yiddish schmus, meaning patter or profit. These in turn come from the Hebrew schmuoss: news or tales. The schmoose was an itinerant Jewish peddlar. The term survives today in Yiddish as schmooze: to have an intimate chat, although the noun schmoozer implies a flatterer. Shonk (19C) comes from the Yiddish shonnicker, a smalltime trader, and leads to the 20C Cockney shonk meaning nose and the Royal navy shonky, a miser whose meanness is typified by his like of drinking but his unwillingness to stand his round. A jew-fencer (18C) is a street salesman or pedlar, usually of stolen goods, while Jack the Jew is a fence\*, usually of the least valuable goods. A Jew joint (US use) is a second hand clothes store, where such fences may operate.

Sheeny began life in Britain c.1816 and progressed to the US sometime during the 19C. On the whole it has become a naturalized US term. Its etymology remains debatable, with Partridge suggesting the overuse of brilliantine on heads of Jewish hair. More likely is his, and Leo Rosten's note of the Yiddish pronunciation of the German schön (pretty, beautiful). Rosten also suggests a derivation from the Yiddish phrase a miesse meshina, meaning an ugly fate or death, which was in common use.

Last of these popular terms is **kike**, which originated in the US c.1900. It is supposedly based on the suffix -ki or -ky that was found in so many of the surnames of the Eastern European Jews who were flooding across the Atlantic to the New World.

A number of terms for Jew are based on rhyming slang: half past two, five to two, quarter to two, four by two, pot or box of glue, Sarah Soo, buckle my shoe, fifteen-two, and kangaroo, all meaning Jew; front-wheel skid, four-wheel or three-wheel skid, God forbids (though far more common as kids) and sauce-

pan lid, all meaning yid; eskimo rhymes with ikey-mo, just as goose is presumably based on the pronunciation 'joose'. In bingo terminology dirty old Jew meant two. Other names include hooknose (20C), hebe (20C, from Hebrew), Red Sea pedestrian (Aus., from the Biblical Exodus myth), and the particularly repellent oven-dodger (a British coinage in common, if sniggering currency; the ovens, of course, are those of Auschwitz and Treblinka). Jewish kashrut laws give porker (19C) while traditional menus have coined bagel bender (US) and lox jock (US, lox being smoked salmon and jock an aficionado). A JAP is a Jewish-American princess, the by-word in spoilt brats.

Finally the racial tension between America's blacks and Jews give Goldberg (a generic surname), fast-talking Charlie (a smoother version of the usual Mr Charlie, a white man), the similarly duplications slick-'em-plenty and three balls (fr. the ghetto pawnbroking shops that are often run by Jews).

### STEREOTYPICAL TERMS

In slang Jew as a noun and a verb is based on the primary racial stereotype (other than that of 'killing Christ'): that of grasping miserliness and of exorbitant usury. In neither case need the term apply to an actually religious Jew. Thus a jew (17C) is a mean person, a skinflint while to jew or jew down is to cheat financially. It was not until the OED produced the second volume of its supplements (H-N, 1976) that the note 'These uses are now considered to be offensive' was added, although some campaigners still fought hard to have both terms excluded in their entirety.

The sense of greedy miserliness and an obsession with money underlines a number of terms. Among the earliest is the 16C worth a Jew's eye, which denotes great value and is assumed to refer to the medieval torturers who, amongst other measures, put out Jews' eyes to force them to hand over their possessions. Jew bail (18C) was insufficient or useless bail while the phrase thick as two Jews on payday (19C) means very intimate and a Jewish compliment (19C) offers a girl a large penis but no presents. A Jew sheet is an

account, often imaginary, of money lent to friends. To take the Jewish airlines is to walk, another testimony to meanness.

Jewish Oxo (20C) is money (it makes 'gravy') while Jewish lightning is deliberate arson in order to gain the insurance on an otherwise unprofitable business. The Yiddisher or Jewish piano or the Jew Joanna (rhyming slang) is a cash register; it was also used c.1907 to describe the the first taximeters, installed in London cabs by the General Cab Company. The Jewish typewriter is also a cash register. Jewish overdrive is freewheeling down hills to save petrol (cf. Mexican overdrive) while the assumption that even successful Jews remain bound by their essential vulgarity informs Jew's Bentley or Jew's Rolls Royce (1930s), meaning a Jaguar, as does Jew canoe, which in the US means a Cadillac. The 'vulgarity' smear further underlines Jewish Renaissance or Jewy Louis: flashy interior decoration, probably featuring (fake) Louis XV or Louis XVI furniture—over-elaborate and in doubtful taste.

The widespread Jewish involvement in tailoring led to a number of 19C terms, often found in the services. The Royal Navy has jewing (tailoring), jewer (a rating who for a given wage will make another man's uniform), a jewing bar or jewing bundle (a bag in which a sailor's of sewing kit is kept) and a jewing firm (a group of men who are a self-appointed tailoring 'company' on board ship). A Jew's harp (RN) was a shackle shaped like the musical 'harp' that secures the anchor chain to the anchor; Jew's letters are tatooing—presumably from the use of a needle, albeit not a tailor's. The Army adds Jew parade to describe the cookhouse duties imposed on anyone failing to attend church on Sunday morning, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Aside from the Jewish compliment\* the main aspect of Jewish sexuality to influence slang is circumcision. Thus Jewish corned beef, a Jew's lance and Jewish National (the reference is to the Hebrew National brand of kosher salami) all mean a circumcised penis, as does a secondary use of Jewish compliment; a Jewish nightcap is a foreskin while Jewish by hospitalization (gay use) refers to a circumcised gentile. In Jewish foreplay the man pleads for sex, while his partner refuses all physical contact.

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Geography creates a number of terms. In the US Jew Town is the Jewish area of any city, while Jew York is New York; Sidney, Australia, is Yidney and Johannesburg, South Africa is Jewburg. Those areas of London with notable concentrations of Jews include Yidsbury (Finsbury), Abrahamstead (Hampstead), Cricklewitch (Cricklewood), Goldbergs Green (Golder's Green); all these appear anti-semitic but according to Partridge, who cites a Jewish informant, are 'self mocking'. Jewish cookery gives jewbutter (US, 19C) meaning goose fat and Jewish penicillin: chicken soup. Jew food is ham. The religious prohibition of pork gives to go down like a pork chop at a Jewish wedding (to make a gross social faux pas) and as useless as a pork chop or a slice of bacon at a Jewish wedding (extremely unpopular).

Among other terms are Hebrew (17C) meaning unintelligible, a Jewish forest, used in poker for three threes (fr. the pronunciation t'ree t'rees) while a jew's poker (19C) is a gentile who lights the fires on the Sabbath, a figure known in Yiddish as the Shabbos goy (lit. Sabbath gentile). Synonymous with Jew or Jewish is Jerusalem. Such terms include the Jerusalem cuckoo (20C British Army) a mule, the Jerusalem pony (20C) an ass, a Jerusalem parrot, a flea and a Jerusalem artichoke, a donkey (rhy. sl. artichoke: moke). The actual vegetable is known to grocers as a Jewboy. Jerusalem the Golden or Jerusalem-on-Sea is Brighton, home to many Jews. Finally the Jews themselves differentiate their numbers between Litvaks and Polacks (immigrants respectively from Lithuania and Poland) and describe their non-Jewish neighbours variously as goys or goyim (fr. the Hebrew word meaning nation) and yoks; a shikse is a gentile girl, thus the rhyming slang flour mixer and a shaygets is a gentile boy.

# THE IRISH

In the realm of racial stereotypes, few nations fare worse than do the Irish, branded for at least two centuries as slow-witted, bungling THE IRISH 279

peasants. The bulk of these terms, like the immigrants themselves, arrived during the 19C.

Irish by itself means either whiskey, in which capacity it has served since at least the 17C, or anger (thus, get your Irish up). Combinations with Irish, in no special order, include Irish assurance (bold, forward behaviour, otherwise known as having been dipped in the Shannon), Irish evidence (17C, perjury), the Irish harp (a long-handled shovel, known elsewhere as a banjo, or Mexican dragline). The rhyming slang Irish jig (20C) is either a wig or cig (arette). An Irish mile is synonymous with a country mile, in both cases winding and apparently much longer than the yardstick might indicate. To be Irish as Paddy's pig or straight from the bog is to be quintessentially Irish.

To maintain the stereotypes, one has a number of terms pertaining to the sea, to violence, and to potatoes. The former include an Irish hurricane or Paddy's hurricane, both of which mean a flat calm, Irish pennants, which are frayed ends of ropes flapping in breeze and an Irish man o'war or Irish battleship — an unpowered barge. Violence, especially on a domestic level, or as inspired by an excess of drink, offers the Irish beauty (a woman with two black eyes), the Irish wake which is any boisterous occasion, not necessarily a wake as such and the Irish wedding which means variously masturbation, the emptying of a cesspool, or what in the 18C Frances Grose termed any occasion 'where black eyes are given instead of favours'. A donnybrook, from the eponymous village, means a a large-scale public brawl. Irish confetti is bricks, especially as tossed during such a riot, although it can also be a large emission of semen, while an Irish hoist is a kick in the behind.

Potatoes, the supposed national staple, can be Irish apples, apricots, grapes (and Paddy's grapes) or lemons, while the Irish mails are sacks of potatoes, a reference to the substantial 19C Anglo-Irish trade in the commodity. Other food references include Irish turkey (US) corned or (UK) salt beef and cabbage and an Irishman's dinner meaning a fast.

As Irish beauty, above, indicates, Irish women, in slang at least, have a poor reputation for physical charm. This is borne out by Irish draperies (pendulous breasts), Irish fortune (the vagina),

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and Irish legs or arms (heavy female legs). Nor does Irish sexuality get much recommendation: Irish whist 'where the jack takes the ace' is sexual intercourse, an Irish clubhouse is a refined house of prostitution, an Irish dip sexual intercourse, an Irish marathon an extended session of lovemaking, an Irish root or Irish toothpick the penis and an Irish toothache an erection. An Irish promotion or Irish rise is either masturbation or the loss of one's erection; in the non-sexual area it means a loss of wages. Irish horse is either an impotent penis or, as food, tough, undercooked salt beef. The Irish shave is an act of defecation.

The Irish as nature's labourers are found in an Irish buggy or Irish local (both US, local usually means a local railway or subway line) a wheelbarrow and the Irish screwdriver meaning a hammer (cf: Birmingham screwdriver, Jewish screwdriver). One of the few positive terms is Irish lace, a spider's web, although in US politics an Irish shift is an even a more than routinely hypocritical action by a politician. Finally come the lace-curtain Irish: genteel petit-bourgeois Irish-Americans; who adorn their windows with such items and the rhyming slang exclamation too Irish stew! meaning too true!

Paddy, the diminitive of Patrick, is synonymous with Irish and thus Paddyland or Patland means Eire. And in a grim finale, a Fenian or three cold Irish was the name given in late 19C Victorian taverns for the threepenny measures of Irish whiskey and cold water, sold both in 1867 when the Fenians Allen, Larkin and O'Brien—The Manchester Martyrs—were hanged for the murder of Police Sergeant Brett and in 1882 when three more Fenians were hanged for the Phoenix Park murders in Dublin.

## THE DUTCH

In Britain's lexicon of national stereotypes the Dutch are two-faced, selfish, gluttonous and definitely not a nationality with whom to do business. A harsh judgement on a country best-known to most

contemporary Britons for its footballers and its liberal drug legislation, but between the 17th and 18th centuries – after the Spanish and prior to the French – the Dutch provided the necessary national enemy. Rivals in trade, as well as on the battlefield, the Dutch were convenient bugbears and much of the slang that has accrued to the word **Dutch** duly reflects that role.

Ironically, given the imminence of the French or frogs\* as the national bogeymen, the 18C Dutch were known as froglanders, possibly from the term Dutch nightingale, a frog. Alternatively a Dutchman was a butterbox. Dutchman, however, meant a German, a terminology reflected in the phrase Pennsylvania Dutch, a German, not Flemish dialect, and based on a mispronunciation of deutsch, meaning German.

Dutch as a noun is best known as a Cockney term for wife, almost invariably as old Dutch. The precise origins of this remain debatable. Either, as is still the majority belief, the term is an abbreviation of the rhyming slang Duchess of Fife, or, according to the 19C music hall star Albert Chevalier, whose signature song was entitled 'My Old Dutch', the term was semantically linked to another piece of slang: dial\*: face. In Chevalier's version, the original term was 'my old Dutch clock', whose face, ie. dial, resembled that of his wife. Partridge, formerly a partisan of the Duchess, claimed to have changed his mind in the later editions of the DSUE. The OED, however, while citing Chevalier's song in 1893, has a previous citation, dated four years earlier, and states unequivocally that in this context dutch is 'an abbrev. of duchess'. A secondary noun form is as beer, a 17C term which is part of a list in which English is ale, Spanish sack, Latin Alicante and so on. A second piece of undoubted rhyming slang is dutch plate (20C), meaning mate.

While none of these noun forms has any bearing on racial stereotyping, as a verb **dutch** offers a selection of hostile terms, meaning variously to speak emphatically, to ruin another's business, social standing, enjoyment, etc. with deliberate malice; or to bet in such a way that the bank is broken.

From hereon in, in a variety of more or less pejorative combinations, stereotyping takes over. Perhaps the best-known of these put-downs is **Dutch courage**, cowardice that, fortified by gener282 THE DUTCH

ous quantities of alcohol, becomes (temporary) bravery. Coined during the 18C it has gained a modern successor in **dry Dutch courage**, in which the consumption of narcotics replaces that of the traditional alcohol. Almost equally common is the **Dutch uncle** (19C), whose persona trades on the image of the Dutch as stolid Calvinists. Thus to talk like a **Dutch uncle** is to talk severely and critically, to lay down the law. Thus **Dutch consolation** or **comfort** (18C) is strictly limited; as Grose defined it in 1796, 'Thank God it is no worse'. To talk double **Dutch** or **Dutch fustian** or **High Dutch** was (and in the case of double Dutch remains) to talk any foreign language.

To turn to Anglo-Dutch mercantile rivalry, a **Dutch bargain** (17C) is either a one-sided bargain, or a deal concluded over drinks, and as such also known as a **wet bargain**. A **Dutch auction** (19C) is a mock auction or sale in which the much-touted 'reductions' have no bearing in commercial fact; a **Dutch reckoning** (17C) is bill presented as a lump sum, with no details attached; otherwise it is a bill that if disputed only gets higher (17C) or, amongst sailors, a bad day's work (19C). Flanders, synonymous with Holland, offers a **Flanders fortune** (17C): a very small one, a **Flanders piece** (17C):a painting that looks good from a distance but no so good close-up, and a **Flanders reckoning** or **Flemish account** (17C): a badly prepared account, or books that do not balance.

On a social level the Dutch are much vilified as both mean and greedy. Thus the well-known Dutch treat or Dutch party (19C) describes an an outing, a visit to a restaurant, or whatever in which the costs are shared equally —i.e. there is no 'treat' at all in the sense of one party being entertained at the other's expense. To indulge in such an outing is known as eating in Dutch street, and going Dutch, although the latter has also been used for committing suicide, on the lines, presumably, of doing the Dutch (19C): to desert or run away. This meanness is underlined in Dutch fuck (World War II): the lighting of one cigarette from another —thus saving matches. Still in the world of food a Dutch red is a smoked Dutch herring, Dutch gleek (17C) is any form of drinks, and a Dutch feast (18C) is one where the entertainer gets drunk before his friends, while at a Dutch concert or in a Dutch medley

(18C) everyone plays a different tune. A Dutchman's drink (19C) is one that empties the pot or drains some form of communal drinking vessel, while a Dutchman's headache (19C) means drunkenness (cf: Irish headache, Irish toothache).

Britain's maritime rivalry with Holland inevitably coloured the language. A Dutchman's anchor (19C) is anything that has been forgotten or left behind; the term comes supposedly from a Dutch skipper who claimed after suffering a shipwreck that while he had an excellent anchor, he had unfortunately left it at home. To the 17C a Dutch caper was a light privateering ship, while in the 19C a Dutch brig was the cells on a ship (a term perpetuated, without the Dutch, in the US military), Dutch pennants were untidy ropes and a Dutchman's Cape imaginary land on the oceanic horizon. More recently a Dutchman's fart has become a sea urchin. A Dutchman's breeches (19C) are two streaks of blue in an otherwise cloudy sky. A Dutch pump (17C) was a naval punishment involving vigorous pumping.

Given the odium the Dutch in general enjoyed, Dutch women, inevitably, were branded as immoral. **Dutch by injection** meant any woman living with foreigner, a **Dutch widow** (17C) was a whore while a **Dutch wife** (19C) was a bolster, otherwise defined as a 'masturbation machine'. More recently **Dutch dumplings** are the buttocks while a **Dutch girl** is a lesbian, punning on the 'dikes' of Holland (cf. dyke). A **Dutch kiss** describes any form of sexual intimacy, although not intercourse.

On a personal level a **Dutch cheese** (19C) was a bald person, a **Dutch build** or **Dutch built** (19C) indicated a stocky, thickset individual while a **flanderkin** was a fat man. A **Dutch palate** (17C) was a coarse palate, **Dutch pegs** are rhyming slang for legs (cf: **Scotch pegs**) and **Dutch pink** (19C) is blood. A **Dutch oven** is the mouth, although it can also describe the smell of a bed in which someone has just farted (both early 20C).

Finally in dutch (20C) means in trouble or out of favour, to beat the Dutch (18C) meant to do something outstanding while in 19C that beats the Dutch described something that was otherwise barely credible and in the early 20C sink the Dutch was a general exclamation of distaste.

# THE FRENCH

Despite the French, or at least the Normans having played a central role in the essential development of what is now seen as the British character, linguistically France has been set firmly among the tribes without the law since the early 18C. With the gradual fading of Holland as a major power, France, with the advent of first the Revolution and then Napoleon's expansionist wars which pitted her directly against Britain, took over as Britain's national enemy. But although the French too lost their bugaboo status — around the end of the 19C — to be replaced, somewhat reluctantly it sometimes appeared, by the Germans, slang did not forget them. They had gained a secondary, and far more pervasive stereotype: that of sexiness, a quality that, from the Protestant point of view, is perhaps even more threatening than military might.

The adjective **French** is still redolent of fantasies of 'gay Paree' and its supposedly sex-crazed denizens. At best they are obsessed with sex, at worst downright pornographic and dirty. Henry Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, refers, with some disapproval, to 'French novels' in 1749; 'French postcards', those prototype pin-ups, appear a century and a half later, along with the equally 'naughty' French prints, although the **French kiss**, no doubt an age-old phenomenon, is, linguistically at least, a 20C development.

# **GENERAL**

What would appear to be the earliest slang use of French is to describe a variety of slang itself: **pedlar's French**, which from the 14C was a synonym for cant or criminal slang. Thus in 1386 Chaucer described one such user, 'And French she spak ful faire and fetishly/After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe/for Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe'. At the same time **French** or **Frankish fare** meant over elaborate politeness.

By the 17C the Frenchman was shorthand for any foreigner, although the term, plus definite article, moved on in the 19C to

mean alternatively syphilis or brandy. Frenchie (19C) – as in 'those Frenchies seek him everywhere' – meant simply Frenchman.

To have seen the French King (17C) meant to be drunk, while French pie was Irish stew, French pigeon (19C) was a pheasant mistakenly shot in partridge season and a French 75 (fr. the eponymous World War I era gun) was a Tom Collins (a cocktail made of gin, lime or lemon juice, sugar, and soda water) mixed with champagne. A French loaf was £4.00, based on the backslang roaf: four; to French inhale (20C US) was to blow out smoke through the nose, while in the gay lexicon of the Fifties and Sixties a French kiss filter was any filter-tipped cigarette. Another gay term was French bathe, meaning to use perfumes as a deodorant in lieu of bathing. In a new, and somewhat unlikely twist on the traditional Birmingham screwdriver, the French screwdriver is a hammer: the assumption being that the French, like the Brummies, prefer to bash rather than turn their screws. Finally one of the best-known, and older 'French' phrases is French leave (18C), meaning to absent oneself from a job or duty without prior permission; the French duly return the compliment with filer a l'anglaise, meaning just the same.

### **SEXUAL**

Excuse or pardon my French exclaims the genteel euphemism automatically offered after the speaker has sworn in public. There may be a subconscious recognition of the old pedlar's French (above) but this linkage of France and the French to everything 'dirty' underpins the remainder of this vocabulary, much of it central to the discourse of pre-Gay Liberation, ie. unashamedly queeny, campy homosexuality.

Francophobia is at its most rampant in those terms relating to sexually transmitted diseases and a variety of such terms can be found at VENEREAL DISEASE. The deep French kiss, as noted above, is not gender-linked and nor are a range of terms based on oral sex, notably the act of fellatio. Fellatio itself can be French tricks, French love, French head job or the French art or culture (cf: English culture\*, Greek culture\* and Swedish

culture\*), while to french means simply to fellate (1950s); French active is the active (sucking) partner and French passive the fellated. Anyone particularly adept at fellatio is French by injection, (although German or Dutch by injection both refer to a woman, living and having sex with any type of foreigner); French language expert (gay use) is a fellator, while French language training (gay use) means teaching fellatio. To tell a French joke (gay use) is oral stimulation of the anus.

A French letter or French safe (19C) is a contraceptive sheath (the French fight back with capote anglaise), although it was for a time used in the RAF to mean a windsock or wind indicator. A French tickler is a contraceptive sheath with extra protrusions for added stimulation. A French article was a French prostitute (20C) but earlier (18/19C) it could also be synonymous with French cream, elixir or lace to mean brandy. A French postcard (20C, gay use) was an exciting, prospective sexual partner. To speak French was to indulge in unconventional sexual play.

French dip (gay use) is vaginal precoital fluid, French dressing (gay use) is semen as is French-fried ice cream. A French embassy (gay use) was a YMCA where homosexual activity ran extensively and unchecked, a French photographer (gay use) took gay porn, while French stuff (gay use) was either the pictures he captured or simply any out of the ordinary sexual activity. Finally in a camp tribute to a new era, the French revolution was the movement for homosexual rights.

# THE CHINESE

George Orwell set it out in his essay 'Boys' Weeklies' (1939) when he apostrophised the stereotypes of popular culture: 'Chinese: sinister, treacherous, wears pigtail'. This last differentiated him from the Spaniard, Mexican, Arab, Afghan and the like, who betrayed similarly deficient, i.e., non-English, sensibilities but at least scorned the added insult of an alien hairstyle. Of all the racial stereotypes

that have yet fully to vanish, probably only the French and the Jews exercise the same fascination on the British imagination, and on the nation's slang vocabulary, as do the Chinese. And while the first are 'dirty' and the second 'money-grabbing', both at least are white. The heathen Chinee (coined 1870 by US writer Bret Harte [1836-1902] in his poem 'Plain Language from Truthful James', better known, from this coinage, as 'The Heathen Chinee'), or the 'yellow peril' (1890s) as these terms bear out, are not just different, but wily, 'inscrutable' and oriental too. Not only that, but the shape of their eyes is not as that of Western eyes. Thus the 'Chinaman' is not to be trusted, and the underlying implication of all these terms is of something slightly out of true, either physically, ethically, or otherwise. Typical of this attitude are the phrases damned clever, these Chinese, or clever chaps these Chinese, both of which are used when remarking on some particularly ingenious or incomprehensible invention; apparently coined in the Services during World War II and then filtering into 'civvy street', the attribution owes less to the skill of the Chinese than to their supposed wiliness.

The first mainstream appearance of the Far East in slang would appear to date to the mid-19C, when the term **chop-chop**, from Cantonese pidgin, was recorded as being used to mean 'quickly!' or 'hurry up!'. This in turn may well have stemmed from the century-earlier **chop**, meaning to hurry, and presumably imported by sailors involved in the China Sea trade.

It was still geography, rather than racial stereotyping, that created the first slang use of China itself in the UK: mid-19C Cockneys used it as a blanket term, meaning anywhere other than England (possibly even than London) or the place rich people went for holidays; a Chinaman, logically, was thus anyone not wearing Western dress. The other 19C use of china is totally coincident: the rhyming slang china plate, to mean mate. Given that even London's Chinatown (Gerrard Street, Soho) was not really established until the 1970s, specifically racial terms are very much a 20C phenomenon. They include chink, chinky and the rhyming slang tiddley-wink; chinky-chonks (c.1978) means Asians in general, a term reminiscent of the earlier nig-nogs\*, meaning not just

niggers (i.e. West Indians and Africans), but Indians, Pakistanis and Arabs.

Chinaman first appears in SE in the 18C, meaning a trader in porcelain; its purely racial aspect emerges in the 1850s, first used in print by the US writer Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1854. Twenty years later it had crossed the Atlantic, often as 'John Chinaman'. There are various slang terms involving Chinaman: in America a Chinaman's chance (or Chinese chance) means no chance whatsoever, or no luck; it comes from the gold rush of the 1840s, when the Chinese worked otherwise abandoned claims. Chinaman, possibly through the Cockney use of China\*, meant an Irish immigrant to the UK.

A Chinaman's or Chinese copy (1920s) is a slavishly precise drawing of a structure or piece of apparatus, based exclusively on its appearance with no other information; the term is presumably based on the alleged – if unproven – copying by the Chinese of things Western, a slur echoed in attitudes to Japanese inventiveness during the 1950s. A Chinaman's shout is a synonym for a Dutch treat\*. Considered politically incorrect today, the one area where Chinaman still goes unchallenged is in cricket where it is an off break bowled out of the back or side of the hand by a left-handed bowler, an action that is equivalent to that of the right-hander in bowling a leg break. The term was first used to describe the bowling style of the West Indian player Ellis Achong in 1930s. As his name attests, Achong was of Chinese descent, but the slang refers to the wiliness of the bowler, rather than any real racial origin.

Cricket also provides, this time with slantedness aforethought, the Chinese cut (1930s): this is a stroke that sends the ball in quite another direction from that in which the batsman aimed. However such slantedness cannot be solely Chinese, at least in sporting terms: the lucky shot is also known variously as a Staffordshire, Surrey or Harrow cut. Other 'Chinese' terms include Chinese duckets (US), complimentary tickets to a theatrical or sporting event (otherwise known as Chinees); such tickets were punched with holes like old fashioned Chinese money. The holes are also the source of their alternative name: Annie Oakleys, taken from the celebrated markswoman's shooting of the pips from playing cards.

Chinese fire drill (1940s, bedlam, chaos), chinese brown, chinese rocks, chinese white and chinese number 9 are all forms of heroin; sex chinese fashion has the partners lying on their side; the chinese national anthem: loud burp; a chinese ace (US World War I) lands with 'wun wing lo', as does one making a chinese landing; in the same punning refrain chinese consumption (Aus. 1930s) denotes a sufferer with smoker's cough or 'wun bung lung' A popular US phrase for extreme difficulty is harder than chinese arithmetic. The chinese screwdriver (a hammer) is synonymous with the Birmingham screwdriver.

Like its nearer East equivalent an Indian, a Chinese is a Chinese meal, often a takeout; Chinese food is also Chink chow. Chow itself, a synonym for Chinaman in Australia c. 1880, means any food, especially in an institutional setting. Originally used as such in America c. 1856, the term passed onto the Raj, and is recorded as such by Yule and Burnell (*Hobson-Jobson*) in 1886.

Finally the US campus phrase to **get Chinese** is to succumb heavily to a given drug, although usually marijuana; the inference, as ever, is in the stereotype rather than the fact: thus it is the deviousness of the Chinese that underlies the term, not the presence of the quintessential Chinese drug, opium.

# POLICE

# THE POLICEMAN

In the words of John Farmer and W. E. Henley, writing in their Slang and its Analogues (1890-1904), the police are 'a class of men who, perhaps, above all others, have been the recipients of nicknames and epithets, and these, be it noted, not always of a complimentary character.' Indeed, the oldest of such terms, beak, seems to bear this out. It dates to 1573 when in Thomas Harman's Caveat for Common Cursetours it was defined as 'constable'. The term occurs as part of harman beck, harman meaning 'the stocks', and the constable might thus be seen —although there is no hard etymo-

logical proof—as one who works as the 'beak' of the stocks, plucking up malefactors like a bird with a worm. The parallel meaning of magistrate or justice of the peace emerges later: certainly the JP Sir John Fielding was known c.1750 as 'the Blind Beak'. It remains the primary, if dated, use, but the older meaning lasted until the mid 19C. Dekker uses it in 1609, and the term **budge a beak** or 'run away from the constable' appears a year later. But by 1890, despite its use in Thackeray (1840) **beak** as policeman had been long overtaken by a new term.

Peeler, named for Robert Peel, the Secretary for Ireland (1812-18), first described only the Irish constabulary. As of 1828, when Peel's Metropolitan Police Act set up the embryonic modern police force, the term crossed the Irish Sea. Peel's given name added a second term, bobby, although the phrase Bobby the beadle had long been in use to describe the guardian of any open space, and Oxford's proctors, responsible for University discipline, were once called bobbies. Peeler did not survive the 19C in England, although it still persists in Northern Ireland; bobby, a neutral, even affectionate nickname, remains common.

Across the Atlantic the word was cop, anglicised as copper; it emerges around 1840. In either case the term springs from the Latin capere, meaning to take or capture. There is some British dialect use of cop later in the century. Dialect also produces the Liverpudlian scuffer, a derivative of the Scots/Northumbrian scufter meaning a busy, hurrying person; another root may lie in Yorkshire's scuff: 'a mean sordid fellow, the scum of the people' (Wright) and even from scurf, the back of the neck, and thus one who grabs you by it. A further 'occupational' term was the early-19C forty-pounder, referring not to weight but to the cash bonus awarded to any policeman who secured a 'Tyburn ticket', i.e. captured a murderer.

Other general terms include bulky (Scots dial. 1821), fry (fr. pry?), grog (fr. his alleged drinking habits) and mug (US 1929), a term used originally by US tramps to mean a tough guy and thus foisted on their enemy, the policeman. Hobo slang also produced shag and shagger (US 1930 both from the noun meaning a chase organized by the police or irate citizenry). The works stems possibly from being 'worked over' with the third degree, while the

law (1929), and the man (1938, especially amongst drug users, who use the same term for their dealer) are self-explanatory.

The specialist Romany language of gypsies and market traders offers three terms, notably rozzer (1890) which echoes roozlo, meaning strong, although it might be a corruption of 'roast' as in figuratively 'roasting' a villain. Mork (1889) and muskra both come from mooshkeroo: constable. Mingra is another market term, but neither from Romany nor any dialect. Instead it has been linked to minger: prowler, which in turn stems from mingy: deceitful. That said, as a pejorative term it might have links to the Romany mindj, popularised as minge\* and meaning the female genitals.

#### THE DETECTIVE

London's 'detective policemen' were formed, as the plainclothes branch of the regular force, in 1843; by 1856 term had been reduced to 'detective' and by 1879 villains had abbreviated this to 'tec. By the turn of the century there were a number of new terms. Bogey (1910) was based on the old synonym for the devil; like Satan the police were 'persons much to be dreaded'. The busy (1910) was just that; his uniformed colleague might plod steadily along his beat, the detective hustled about. Dick, and its abbreviation D may well stem from the Romany dikk: to look at (derived in turn from the Hindi imperative dekh-na: look!) but since its coinage c.1879 it has been primarily an American usage. Dick also meant Irish-Catholic in America and as such relates to shamus\*, the quintessential 'Irish' nickname for members of the force.

Other terms include hawkshaw (UK 1863) the name of a detective originally created in Tom Taylor's play The Ticket of Leave Man, the first ever melodrama to feature a detective. Hawkshaw was revived by Cecil Henry Bullivant in his 'novelization' of the play, which appeared under same name in 1935 and in US cartoonist Gus Mager's strip Hawkshaw the Detective. Pink (1904, often found as the Pinks) is an abbreviation of the Pinkertons, the detective agency founded by Allan Pinkerton (1819-94) in 1850; the Pinkerton's reputation as strike-breakers gives fink, both a company policeman and a police informer. The fuzz, a popular

term among 1960s youth, and meaning any form of policeman, dates to 1931, although its etymology remains obscure; possibly it comes from 'fuss', since a policeman makes a 'fuss' over criminality.

#### THE NOVICE

As with new boys (and latterly girls) in the army and the world of sports, the novice policeman is a **rookie**. The origin remains obscure, but the accepted etymology is a corruption of 'recruit'; certainly Kipling used it as such in the *Barnack Room Ballads* (1892). That said, the term is almost exclusively American today. In Britain the popular equivalent is the undoubtedly derogatory wally or wolly, which enjoyed a brief celebrity in mainstream slang during the early 1980s. Other terms include butterboy, in whose mouth butter will not melt, and the foolishly naive dupey-dupe. His peers in America are choirboys (the title of a Joseph Wambaugh police procedural), innocents who work strictly by the rulebook.

#### THE UNIFORM

Police uniforms provide, through metonymy, a number of nicknames. Early uniforms, whether American or British, were invariably blue: thus blue, bluebelly, bluebottle, blueboy, bluecoat (all 19C) and, more recently, sky (US 1980). Similarly one finds buttons, brass buttons, and brassey; British plainclothesmen describe their colleagues as the button mob. Colours other than blue emerge in Australia's names for a parking policeman: the brown bomber, and his successor the grey ghost. In Toronto a green hornet is a motorcycle policeman, named both for his uniform and for the Marvel Comics superhero. The briefly popular blue meanie was based on colour as well, but derived its real inspiration from the Beatles' cartoon film, Yellow Submarine (1967).

The traditional policeman works on foot and walking the beat has produced a number of variations on flatfoot (US 1900), including flat, flat arch, flathead, flatter and flattie; similar are beat pounder, pavement pounder and sidewalk snail. Crusher (UK 1835), used variously to mean a naval policeman, a member of the Special Branch or of the military police, as well as the

everyday constable, refers to the officer's supposedly outsize boots. Gumshoe (US 1925), on the other hand, emphasizes the need for silence, and like gum foot, gum heel, gomes, goms and roundheels means detective. Paradoxically so does squeaky shoe.

A rubber heel (UK 1935) works either for Britain's political police—the Special Branch—or the various bodies charged with investigating corrupt policemen. The Special Branch are also known as the heavies, the heavy mob, the hot lot and, acknowledging their bureaucratic masters in Whitehall, the umbrella branch. Their American cousins, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are either feds, G (government) men (US 1922) or T (Treasury) men (US 1938).

#### **LINGUISTIC TERMS**

Like many slang terms, some of those covering the police have a purely linguistic dimension. Though largely obsolete today, backslang has produced slop (UK 1855), esclop, namesclop (police, policeman) and reppock (copper). Other terms include ossifer and Richard (abbrev. of dick). Rhyming slang offers bottle (and) stopper (copper), string and top (cop), club and stick (dick) and in Australia Joe Goss (the boss). The Flying Squad, often known simply as the Squad, is the Sweeney (fr. Sweeny Todd, once the 'demon barber' of Fleet Street), a name popularised in the eponymous television programme of the 1970s. Rural policemen employed in Operation Countryman, investigating corruption in the Metropolitan force, were punningly known as the Swedey (fr. swede: peasant). Uniformed officers on that investigation, routinely dismissed as woodentops (fr. another, juvenile television show) repaid the compliment by calling the plainclothesmen bananas: 'yellow, bent and hanging around in bunches'.

A bent copper unsurprisingly, is a corrupt policeman, known to his criminal 'clients' as a right copper. There are gradations and the Knapp Commission, investigating corruption in the New York Police Dept. c. 1973 came up with two parallel categories. The grass-eater, while still corrupt, remains satisfied with what perks – material and financial – his beat offers; he resists canvassing for

extras. His antithesis, the **meat-eater**, is less easily satisfied and actively compels people to offer him a variety of bonuses. Both are pursed by the **shoo-fly**, described either as a plain-clothes policeman on observation duty or an undercover policeman who spies on his colleagues. Both terms originate in the popular song lyric 'Shoo fly! Don't bother me'.

#### **NAMES**

Although Britain's police recruitment has no specific ethnic bias, the predominance of Irish immigrants in New York created shamus (US c.1925) whether a uniformed policeman or detective (and even more commonly a private detective). It comes from Seamus, a common Irish name and is usually pronounced as such, for all that Humphrey Bogart persists in 'sharmus' in the film of Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep. Variations on shamus include chom, chomus and sham. Paddy, from Patrick, fits the same pattern. Similarly 'Irish' are shamrock (the national emblem) and muldoon (a common surname). A direct lift from the French gives gendarme, which in turn produces John, from which come jack (UK 1854) or jacks (usually meaning detective).

Johnny Darby (UK 1886 fr. darbies: handcuffs), John Nabs, Johnny Gallagher (UK 1935) and Johnny Law (US 1921) all denote a uniformed officer, while John Elbow (he grasps you by it) means detective. Aus. rhy. sl. produced John Hop (1900, cop), which is often found as jonnop (Aus. 1910). Johnny Tin Plate is a rural sheriff in America, as are county mountie (a CB radio term), tin can cop and town clown. The 'metallic' references contrast with gold badge man, a big city detective. Oliver and Ollie both mean uniformed policeman, presumably referring to the comedian Oliver Hardy. Keystone also derives from Hollywood, recalling the Mack Sennett Keystone Cops series of 1919.

Show business provides two further terms, both denoting a pair of patrolmen. Dolly Sisters comes from the singers Janszieka (1893-1941) and Roszika (1893-1970) Deutsch, better known as Jenny and Rosie Dolly. Gallagher and Sheehan punned on

Gallagher and Shean, Irish/Jewish vaudeville stars, touring America from 1910-14. **Sheehan**, spelt thus, was of course Irish — there weren't many Jews on the force — but the real Al Shean was the Marx Brothers' uncle and wrote their hit show *Home Again* in 1914. Finally **five-oh** or **5-0**, currently popular on the streets of America, comes from the long-running television series *Hawaii* 50.

#### **ANIMALS**

As objects of dislike, the police have always been compared with animals. Pigs, bulls and bears are the most common, but others came first. The long obsolete bandog (C15-18, from SE band: chain, plus dog) meant first a bailiff or his assistant, and before that a large guard-dog. The obscure bolly dog (18C) may come from bolly: hobgoblin. Detectives have been known as beagles since the 17C, and bloodhounds since at least 1811. The use of stag is a typical slang reversal. While in nature it is the stag which is pursued, 18C villains turned the meaning around, using it first to mean enemy, then informer and finally policeman.

For the revolutionary young of the 1960s and beyond, the use of pig (c.1811) to mean policeman may have seemed fresh-minted, but in fact it simply revived an early 19C usage. A China Street pig was a Bow Street officer, and the early slang dictionary the Lexicon Balatronicum (1811) offers floor the pig and bolt: knock down the policeman and run off. The more recent Johnny Ham (US 1934 detective) may well claim the same origin. Certainly cozzer (UK: 1920s) comes from the Yiddish chazer: pig. Other Yiddishisms include chapper, possibly a pun on copper, and yentzer meaning fucker, and thus cheat, deceiver and liar.

Bull (US 1859) derives either from the German bulle or the Spanish bul, both slang terms for policemen. It appears in a number of combinations, notably harness bull (US 1903), percentage bull (a bribe-taker) cinder bull and yard bull (both railroad police) and mother bull and mama bull, two terms for policewoman, a job otherwise known by the less than inventive copess or officerette.

American again, bear (US c.1975), the most recent animal coinage, comes from Smokey the Bear, a cartoon figure used in US fire prevention advertising. Citizens' Band radio enthusiasts took up the term to mean state policeman, so-called for the wide-brimmed hat worn by many such officers. It has numerous variants, especially as used to mean policewoman, including girlie bear, lady bear, mama bear, woolly bear, smokey beaver and mama smokey. Bear tracker means detective and baby bear trainee. A nice variation is goldie-locks: a uniformed police woman. Other animals include frog (because he jumps on you suddenly), the derogatory weasel and the roach (fr. cockroach). One fish, the lobster, has been adapted from the 18C term for the red-coated British soldiery.

### **ACTIVITIES**

As the action so the man. What police do, or are seen as doing, has created a number of names, the classic being plod (UK c.1981), taken from Enid Blyton's PC Plod in the stories of Noddy the Elf. The aggressive side of police activities is reflected in door shaker, skullbuster, stick man, knock man or knocko, slapman and the Aus. walloper, while the activities of the man hunter are seen in roper (the image is of a cowboy roping cattle), reeler (who reels you in) and satch (fr. satchel: he puts you 'in the bag'). Similar are nab, pincher, puller, shoulder tapper and clap-shoulder, nipper, snatcher and pinch and padlock man. The essentially underhand activities of the detective give peeker, sneaker, split, spotter and sneezer, all of which can also mean informer. The police can also take on the characteristics of body parts. They can be the arm or the limb (of the law), a claw, an elbow (US 1899), a finger (US 1899), or a nose (UK 1860). Surveillance gives one big eyes and elephant's ears. CID men are known as brains.

# SPECIAL TERMS

Finally, a number of specialist terms. The vice squad is the pussy posse (US fr. pussy: woman as a sex object) or the tom squad (UK 1940s, from tom: prostitute). A plainclothesman hanging

around lavatories in the hope of entrapping gay men is a crapper dick (fr. crapper: lavatory plus dick\*) or one of the pretty police. Community police, parole officers and other supposedly 'caring' figures are known as compash (compassionate officers), while the much derided special constable is a hobby bobby. As well as bear and smokey CB Radio offers Kojak with a Kodak, meaning a policeman manning a radar speed trap and taken from the popular 1970s television show and the make of camera. Skipper or skip means sergeant in the UK, and captain in the US, and in the latter a rusty-gun is a veteran.

# **BEGGARS AND BEGGING**

Britain's recent economic woes may have brought beggars onto the streets in numbers unknown in most people's lifetimes, but the phenomenon of street begging is far from new and such linguistic authorities as Harman and Grose, and such sociologists as Henry Mayhew, whose London Labour and the London Poor (4 vols. 1861-62) make it clear that science of begging was a complex and multi-faceted enterprise whether in the 16th, 18th or 19th century. Indeed, Harman's Caveat (1567) deals almost exclusively with the character and vocabulary of what would become known by 1650 as the canting crew, a term based on cant, from the Latin cantus, meaning singing, song, or chant and as such referring to the patter of various sorts emanating from the begging classes or crew (a word incidentally that is barely altered in its meaning when used as a self-description by today's inner city gangs. Canting is used by Harman only to describe the thieves' and beggars' language but the meaning and its origins are identical.

It is the fine-tuning of the mendicant world and the vocabulary that accompanies it that impresses the modern reader. It is also notable that certain pertinent words, notably **skipper**, **mumper** and **moocher**, have lasted until today, without much variation on the meanings they held up to four centuries ago. Taken in turn, skipper meant sleeping rough, which in 16th century England meant in a barn, and as such probably stemmed from the Welsh ysgubor meaning barn; mumper (beggar) or mump (to beg) appeared c.1670, both come from the Dutch mompen, meaning cheat; the term was further developed (although this use has not persisted) as mumpins, meaning alms. Moocher, found in such variations as the song 'Minnie the Moocher', the New York street insult mook, particularly popular in Scorsese's Mean Streets (1973), and the everyday 'mooching around', all stem from the earlier mooch or mouch, itself rooted in Old French muchier to hide or skulk. Other terms, typically go to Bath, still have a contemporary resonance. As a wealthy, fashionable town Bath attracted a flood of beggars in the 18C; those citizens who complain of today's invasion of crusties would doubtless sympathise.

#### THE 'CANTING CREW'

It is impossible to list every gradation of beggar, although the reader should look also at the section on THIEVES and thieving for further information. Harman, writing of the cursetors (fr. Latin currere: to run) or vagabonds of Elizabethan England, cites three chief orders of 'the unruly rabblement of rascals': upright men, rogues and palliards, and at the end of his work, actually lists a selection of the most notorious, or at least those who frequented what are now the Home Counties. Among such long-dead names are 'Harry Smith, hee dryveleth when he speaketh', 'Robert Browswerd, he weareth his heare long'and 'Richard Horwood, wel neer lxxx. yeare old, he will bite a vi. peny nayle asunder with his teeth and a baudy dronkard.' Although these labels, and some that follow, appear to be standard English, they were all specialist terms of their time, each pertaining to a distinctive style of beggary.

In due order, the **upright man** was a senior criminal, outranked (if at all) only by a **ruffler**. The term comes literally from his stance—he adopted no form of counterfeit physical deformity as did many of his peers—and in his pose as a solid citizen. As such he both gulled the public and commanded loyalty and financial dues from his inferiors. The **rogue** (which term held a specific cant meaning

between the 16C-18C, before it was absorbed into standard English) wandered the country armed with some form of official-looking letter or other document to justify such travelling. Backed by this 'licence' he would beg for alms, often underlining his appeal with claims of illness. Sometimes he worked with a woman, a pullet, as a team. The palliard took his names from the French paille, or straw, upon which he slept as wandered the country, taking his nightly refuge in barns or outhouses. The antithesis of the upright man, he adorned himself with faked, but still convincingly hideous sores and wounds. His clothes were invariably ragged, and his patched cloak was almost a badge of office. The term emerged c.1484, alongside its standard English definition: 'a low or dissolute knave; a lewd fellow, a lecher, a debauchee'.

To these Harman adds a number of fellow villains, not all of whom were strictly beggars, although all wandered the countryside. The ruffler, the 'first rank of canters', posed as soldier, but actually worked as an itinerant robber; the word comes from SE ruffle it. to swagger and is linked to the idea of a bird ruffling up its feathers. The hooker or angler, used a hook on a stick to filch objects from market stalls, shops and passing carts, a prigger of prauncers was a horse thief (prig: steal, prauncer: a horse). A frater (Latin: brother) was a fake friar claiming to beg alms for a hospital or charitable institution; adopting a similarly religious guise an abraham or abram man or cove, was a 'lusty strong rogue' who posed as a poor, crazy and, through his deliberately tattered clothing, naked or 'abraham' man. Abraham men appeared shortly after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538: bereft of the alms they had regularly gathered from such institutions, they were forced to beg for their subsistence. Two centuries later, the term had been adopted by those who posed as sham naval ratings, equally distressed, and equally demanding. A fresh-water mariner, 'their shippes were drowned in the playne of Salisbury', claimed to have suffered shipwreck or piracy; a counterfeit crank (fr. Dutch or German krenk: sickness) faked sickness, a dommerar or dummerer feigned dumbness, often claiming to have suffered at the hands of the infidel Turk who, on capturing them during a sea voyage, had torn out their tougue for denying Muhammed; a jark man forged passports (for internal travelling) and a glimmer claimed to have lost all his, or more commonly her possessions in a fire (fr. glim: fire).

A more general term is **clapperdudgeon**: 'a beggar born'. The word comes from the combination of *clapper*, meaning hitter, plus *dudgeon*, the hilt of a dagger. Its origins remain a mystery, but it has been suggested that it comes from the beggar hitting his *clapdish* (a wooden dish with a lid, carried by lepers, beggars and mendicants generally, to give warning of their approach, and to receive alms) with a *dudgeon*. The later **staff striker** means much the same.

Although women are not included in his lists of names ('the number of them is great and would ask a large volume'), Harman includes a number of female beggars: a bawdy basket sold obscene literature (as well as pins, ballads and other goods); an autem mort (meaning married woman and taken from the cant terms autem: church and mort: woman) was the companion of an upright man—'shee is a wyfe married at the church and they be as chaste as a cowe, [which] gooeth to bull every month, with what bull she careth not.' A walking mort, often accompanied by a child, claimed to be widowed and begged for her and her offspring's keep; doxies (fr. the Dutch docke, a doll) and dells ('a yonge wenche, able for generation, and not yet knowen by the vpright man') were simple beggars, usually alongside a man. Last came the kynchin co and kynchin mort: boys and girls brought up to beg and steal.

Uncatalogued by Harman, are further contemporary terms and occupations. Master of the black art meant any beggar; a curtall or curtail was noted for his characteristic short jacket (curtail), while a Tom of Bedlam or Bedlam beggar, was the genuine version of the poor, ragged madman counterfeited by the abraham man. His name was taken from Bedlam, by the 16th century a generic term for lunatic asylum, but originally applied specifically to the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in London, founded as a priory in 1247, with the special duty of receiving and entertaining the bishop of St. Mary of Bethlehem, and his retinue as often as they might come to England. A general hospital by 1330, it became in 1402 a hospital for lunatics; on the Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was granted to the mayor and citizens of London, and in

1547 incorporated as a royal foundation for the reception of lunatics. A hallan shaker (fr. Scots hallan: the partition of a cottage wall, especially when it cut off the front door from the fire) referred to any 'sturdy' or able-bodied (and possibly violent) beggar. To beg was to maund, possibly from the French mendier: to beg, which in turn came from the Latin mendicus: a beggar and as such the root of the SE mendicant. The Romany mang: to beg, has similar origins. Strike, which in the 18C meant borrow, meant simply steal.

#### EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The 'canting crew', in whatever guise, persisted as the basis of professional beggary until the middle of the 18th century, with some occupational terms persisting even longer. The New Canting Dictionary of 1725 lists not merely Harman's core of mendicant villains, but dozens of extra criminal types, amassing a grand total of some 64 in all, although by no means all were beggars; they can be found under THIEF. Sixty years later Francis Grose, in the first edition of his own dictionary, had cut them back to 23, fourteen types of men and nine of women and children — essentially repeating Harman's categories.

The slang dictionaries of the 19C show that some new words had joined the mendicant lexicon, even if the basic methods of extracting cash from the unwary remained essentially the same. The fresh water mariner had become the turnpike or dry land sailor; the palliard had become the scoldrum (fr. SE scald: burn), equally resplendent in his faked burns, scars and wounds, often created by the deliberate burning of the body with a mixture of acids and gunpowder; the abraham man was now a shallow cove, Shivering James or Shivering Jemmy, all working the 'shivering dodge': appearing naked, they would be given old clothes, these were promptly sold, and the shiverer reappeared, as naked as ever. Shallow coves were making 10/- to 15/- a day in the 1830s. The rogue, armed with his faked documents had been replaced by the silver beggar, brandishing fake 'briefs' - 'official' papers, personal testimony and the like -to claim losses in fire, shipwreck and other alleged disasters. The bawdy basket had been joined by the

durrynacker, a female lace-hawker, who doubled as a fortune-teller; the term may come from the Romany dukker. to tell fortunes.

Other contemporary terms include the croaker, who whinged on about his problems; the maunder(er), (a traveller, cf. maund); the shyster (possibly related to the shicer\*: an objectionable person, from the German scheisse: a shitter); the goose shearer, who shears gullible 'geese'; the needy-mizzler, a very shabby beggar, from mizzle meaning to run off (without paying). The rampager (fr. ramp: swindle), the pike, piker or pikey (fr. pike: turnpike), the shack (fr. shake or shake-rag) were all general terms for beggar. Pikey still exists, although piker means shirker in 20C Australia. Cadge (1810, from catch), spring (as in 'spring for a quid') and mike (a variation on mooch) meant beg. Australian vagabonds went on the wallaby: in the bush the wallaby was often the only creature to leave perceptible tracks; some led to water, others were aimless and wandering; the same thing went for the human'wallaby' who might have been looking for food or work, or might simply have been walking at random.

### TRAMPS

The line between the tramp and the beggar is thin, but if the beggars listed above are professionals, travelling the country as an adjunct to the begging that underpinned their daily life, then tramps, can perhaps be seen primarily as travellers. To some extent, therefore, the terminology reflects this difference of emphasis. The gentleman of the pad (fr. pad: road), the land-raker, the scatterling, and the tinkler all wandered the roads in 18th and 19th century England. Pad (fr. the Dutch pad, and Old High German pfad, and the cant equivalent of the SE path) is central to the begging world. The high pad (listed in Harman, is the highway or turnpike; the padder a beggar, a rum pad (18C, cf. rum\*) and a footpad both highway robbers, while a padding crib\* or padding ken\* was a lodging house. Their contemporary successors include the hurricane lamp (rhy. sl.), the bindle stiff (US 20C, from bindle: a bundle and stiff: a man), a bum (who tramps but rarely works; from the German bummler, loafer) and a hobo (who also tramps

but whenever possible takes a job; the etymology remains obscure, although claims have been made for 'hoe-boy', a migrant farm-worker), the dosser (who sleeps rough, from 19C doss: sleep, itself from the Latin dorsus: back) and the bag lady (1972, originally a shopping bag lady, so called from her collection of bags with which she invariably travels). The hippie era offered a collective noun: street people, who wore the clothes but espoused more of a traditional begging ethic than that of the 'love and peace' generation. Love, in some debased form at least, was offered by the gay cat, a tramp that hangs around to pick up women.

Other modern terms include the **dero** (1970, derelict), the **glimmer**, (possibly from the 19C **glim-lurk**: the pleading for alms after suffering a supposed fire, but surely dating back to Harman's similarly named beggar); the **panhandler** (US, late 19C; the term stems from the goldfields, where hopefuls panned for gold, washing earth and rocks in perforated 'pans'), and the Yiddish **schnorrer**, from the German *schnurren*: to go begging.

# THE THIEF

Like the criminal beggar the thief is responsible for a good deal of the earliest slang, or more precisely cant. As Leathermore's Advice, or, The Nicker Nicked, put it in 1666: 'Towards night, when ravenous Beasts usually seek their Prey, there comes in shoals of Hectors, trepanners, Guilts, Pads, Biters, prigs, Divers, Lifters, Kid-Nappers, Vouchers, Mill-kens, Pymen, Decoys, Shop-lifters, Foilers, Bulkers, Droppers, Famblers, Donnakers, Crosbyters, &c. Under the general application of Rooks.' It was ever thus and while the vocabulary may change, the larcenies remain the same.

# **THIEVES**

Thieves in general were a central part of the canters or canting crew\* of professional criminals who 'chaunt' or 'cant' the cant language of the contemporary underworld. A century later they

had gained another name, relevant at least to those whose activities centred on London: alsatians. Alsatia, whether Higher Alsatia (Whitefriars in the City) or Lower Alsatia (around the Mint in Southwark), was thus named for Alsace Lorraine, the marginal, disputed border area between France and Germany. Higher Alsatia, its earlier manifestation, was once the lands of the Whitefriars Monastery, extending from The Temple to Whitefriars Street and from Fleet Street to the Thames. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the area went downhill, and as allowed by Elizabeth I and James I its inhabitants claimed exemption from jurisdiction of City of London. As such the area became a centre of corruption, a refuge for villains and a no-man's-land for the law. As Lord Macaulay put it 'At any attempt to extradite a criminal, bullies with swords and cudgels, termagent hags with spits and broomsticks poured forth...and the intruder was fortunate if he escaped...hustled, stripped and jumped upon.' The privileges were abolished in 1697, but it was decades before the old habits died out.

The cross (17C, opposite of the square and as such another generic term for thieving) gives the cross cove (17C, a swindler), a cross boy (Aus. 19C, a crook), a cross-biting cully (1700, a dicing sharp), a cross crib (19C, a house kept by and for villains), a cross man (19C, thief), a cross-mollisher (19C, a female professional thief, from moll\*) and a cross rattler (19C) a fake cab which is actually used to carry off the loot from a robbery.

Other generic terms for a thief are roberd's man (17C), from 'roberd' or Robin Hood, a kiddy (18C), a family man (cf. Johnsons), a flash cove, flash man or flash gentry (18C). A push (18C) was a criminal gang, a term that has been preserved in 20C Australia, albeit usually stripped of its criminal overtones. The 19C has family and the US Johnsons or Johnson family (possibly from the common-ness of the surname), while the 20C has wise guys and the Mob (both specifically the Mafia). US criminals are also known collectively as good people, a term that may hark back to the 16C cant term bene\*, meaning good or excellent. British villains can work as a crew (which can also be used in an ostensibly non-criminal way of skinheads and of young blacks), a team (thus team-handed: working in a group, typically

of bank robbers), a firm, and a mob (with mob-handed). A made man is a member of the US Mafia, while the US teenage street gangs of the 1950s/1960s had debs (girlfriends) and coolies (unaffiliated youths). A top criminal can be a damber or dimber damber (17C, lit. a handsome rascal), an aaron (19C, the Biblical Aaron was first High Priest), an arch rogue (18C), arch-cove (19C) or arch gonnof (19C, from the Yiddish gonnif\*: thief); a top woman criminal is an arch dell or arch doxy (both 17C); a kite (20C) is one who 'flies high'). An expert thief is a boman or bowman (18C, from beau man), a top sawyer (19C) or a tradesman (19C). Today's terms include the Man (although this is also a policeman and a drug dealer), Mr Big, a rounder (Canada, but US 19C, from 'going the rounds' of the criminal underworld) and one of the Ten (the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Criminals list).

More general terms include the 16C prig, prigger, prigman or Prince Prig; the term comes either from the Latin pregare: to pray, and as such underlines the contemporary role of criminal beggars, or prig = prick = sting = rob or cheat; prig meaning a carping knowall may have similar roots, but may be based on the 17C divine Richard Baxter (1615-91) who in 1684 associated it with the initial letters of PRoud IGnorance. Prig, in its criminal sense, could also be a synonym for the drunken tinker, a 16C ne'erdowell who, accompanied by his woman, wandered the country, mixing villainy and legitimate work, pursuing neither, it appears, with a great deal of energy. The 17C brings puggard (fr. pug: to tug or pull), napper (fr. nap: to grab or steal), nimmer (fr. nim: to steal; SE from 9-16C, then cant) and pieman or pyman. The snammer (19C) was more usually found as a pudding-snammer, who stole from cookshops. A dromedary or a purple dromedary was a clumsy thief, referring to the ungainliness of the creature. Saint Peter's sons (18C) is based on the Biblical Saint Peter 'the greatest fisherman' (cf. angler, hooker), the fidlam-bens (18C) would grab anything, irrespective of its value, while the filching cove and filching mort (18C) were male and female thieves, specialising in the filch, or long pole with which to snare items of value. Gonef, gonnif, gonnof and the abbreviated gun (all from the Yiddish gonif: thief) emerge in the 19C, as do gazlon (Yid.), tealeaf

(rhy.sl.), finder, geach, (fr. Scots geach: to steal) gleaner, gutter-prowler, klep (fr. kleptomaniac), nabber, (US) and practitioner. Traveller (19C) was the self-description of beggars, vagrant thieves and other movers about, as was commercial (19C), borrowing from the legitimate commercial traveller. 20C terms include roller (cf. jack-roller), babbler and babbling brook (Aus. rhy.sl.: crook), body, bandit, buck, face, hardhead (Aus.), merchant, operator and perp (fr. SE perpetrator, as used by the police).

Small-time criminals include the filcher and Hugh Prowler (both 16C), the sneaksman or sneaking budge (17C, cf. budge), the lumper (18C), defined as 'the lowest order and more contemptible species of thieving who lurk around and grab whatever they can regardless of value, funker (18C, the lowest order of thieves), the nibbler or nibbling cull (19C) the prowler (19C, UK petty thief, US housebreaker) and the snick fadger (19C, from snick: snatch, fadge: farthing). 20C petty thieves include the cruncher and pie-eater (both Aus.), the heel and the ironically contemptuous international milk thief, parking-meter thief or bandit and the tearaway. In the alleged hierarchy of the US Mafia, the lowest ranks are soldiers or button-men.

A young or novice criminal has been a Newgate bird or Newgate nightingale (18C, from the prison in which they are destined to end up), a Tyburn blossom (18C, from the Tyburn gallows: a young thief, who will in time ripen into the mature one), eriff (18C) and ziff (19C), JD (juvenile delinquent), a schoolboy or a virgin. Despite constant misreadings, a gunsel or gonsil had nothing to do with guns but was a criminal's young, and possibly homosexual accomplice. Assistants and lookout men included the snapper or snapper-up (16C, then 20C US meaning plain thief), the standing budge (17C, fr. budge: to skulk), the pushing tout (1718, especially when operating in a push or crowd), the cover or coverer (19C, he covers the actual thief, pickpocket or whomever), the whisper (19C) and the decker (20C, possibly from decko: a glance). A clicker (18C) was the gang member deputed to divide up the spoils fairly; in prison jargon it meant warder: one who clicks the key, cf. sneck drawer). The carrier (17C) either carried information between gang members or carried away the

proceeds of a robbery, of pick-pocketing and so on; the swagsman was his 19C successor (fr. 16C swag: a shop, and thus the shop's contents or in this case potential booty). An earwig (20C) is a look-out), a seducer (20C, Afro-American) one who provides means of making illicit cash and a set-up man (20C) is a planner.

# THIEVES BY JOB

Many villains could be further identified by the area of theft in which they specialised. Primary among them are pickpockets, burglars and housebreakers, violent criminals, swindlers and conmen, forgers and counterfeiters. These are listed in their own discrete sub-sections. Other specialities, from cloak-snatching to grabbing goods from the back of vans, appear below, in no particular order other than the generally chronological. Among the earliest of villains, whose 'job descriptions' linked theft, swindling and beggary, were those members of the canting crew\* listed in Harman's Caveat, specifically the abraham cove, palliard, counterfeit-crank, dommerar or dummerer, frater, freshwater mariner, glimmerer, ruffler, upright man, and curtall. They have all been dealt with properly under BEGGING. The knight of St Nicholas or knight of the blade (16C) was a wandering ruffler\* living on his wits.

The swigman or swygman (16C) was a vagrant thief who posed as a pedlar; the term possibly originates in swag: a heavy pack and must be the ancestor of the 19C Australian swagman. The Irish toyle (17C) was another fake beggar, who adopted the disguise in order to gain entrance to houses which he then robbed. The lully prigger (16C), the hedge creeper (17C) and the snow dropper or snow gatherer (19C) all stole linen from hedges (where once washing was laid out to dry) or latterly from washing lines; they are the predecessors of the modern knickers bandit (20C), although it is sexual excitement rather than the desire to sell his booty, that primarily informs the latter.

The ark-man, ark-pirate, ark ruff or ark ruffian (18C) worked as a river thief, as did the waterpad or water-sneak (18C); the river rat (19C) stripped the corpses of those who drowned in

London's River Thames. The resurrection cove (19C) stole from graveyards and turned his grim booty over to the teaching hospitals for dissection. A blue pigeon flyer or bluey-hunter (18C) stole lead or blue pigeon from house roofs; the dubber (17C, was a lock picker, from dub: lock); the cloak twitcher (18C) stole cloaks by twitching them off wearer's back, as did the silk-snatcher (18C); the sutler (17C) stole handkerchiefs, gloves, knives, snuffor tobacco-boxes and similar small items; the SE sutler sells provisions to soldiers. The flimper and the jerry sneak (19C) specialised in watches (jerries) although the term could also mean a henpecked husband; onion hunters (19C) opted for seals, and other watch-chain trinkets; the toy getter (19C) stole watches. The poulterer (19C) stole from letters - the image is one of gutting a chicken. The jilter, jilt or gilt (18C, from jilt: a crowbar or gilt: a skeleton key) or note-blanker (19C) worked as a sneak thief and a hotel thief. The night bird, night-cap, night-hunter, night-poacher, night-snap, night-trader, night-walker and nighthawk (all 19C) preferred to operate at night.

The 20C has the reader and the slow walker (US: both follow postmen to rob them); the dunnigan worker (one who robs in public lavatories, from dunnigan\*); the shitter (one who excretes in the place where he steals), the nailer (an extortionist, but also a policeman); the 19C van-dragger has been succeeded by the jump-up merchant or jump-up man (all of whom loot carts or trucks of their contents); the blagger (possibly from blackguard) was once a youthful mugger but now means thief.

# HOUSEBREAKERS AND BURGLARS

17C housebreakers include the mill ben (fr. mill: chisel, ben: good), the snudge (fr. sneak and budge?; he enters a house, hides and then emerges to rob it late at night), the darkman's budge (a thief's accomplice who enters the house, opens it and lets the gang in) and the glazier or running glazier who goes in via a window. Entry though an open or unlocked window creates a number of terms: the jump (18C, he jumps through a window), the garreteer (19C, specialising in attics and skylights), the par-

lour jumper (19C), the back-jumper (late 19C, using the back windows) and the fagger (18C, and with its root in fag: to work hard for another, cognate with the public school term fag: a junior boy who works for his seniors) or diver (16C), a small boy who, like Oliver Twist in Dickens' eponymous novel, is put in through an otherwise impassably small window; once inside the house he either lets the gang in or passes booty out to them; a little snakesman (18C) performs the same service, although he enters through a drain, while the snakesman (19C) is his adult peer. 18C terms include jacob (who like his Biblical predecessor is armed with a jacob or ladder), a crack or cracksman (18C), and a ken-burster and ken-cracker, both from the 17C ken-miller, and all meaning house (ken) breaker. The eves-dropper (18C) lurked outside a house waiting for chance to break in while its owners were absent and a skylarker (18C) doubled as a journeyman bricklayer, using the legitimate job to facilitate the villainy: he gets up early - 'with the lark' - to spy out vulnerable houses.

A screwsman (19C) takes his name from the screw or skeleton key, while the pannyman (19C) derives from panny: house. Other 19C terms are breaker, crib-man and crib-cracker (fr. crib: house), the creep or creeper was a sneak thief, an area-sneak (who robbed basements, adjacent to the area), a baster (US), a buster (mid-19C) a second-story man or a dancer (a cat burglar who 'dances' along the roof and in through a convenient window; the 20C use refers to those who steal from empty offices), a draw latch and a sneck drawer (fr. 14C sneck: latch), both meaning latchlifter. The 20C has flat worker (who specialises in robbing flats) and an in-and-out man (a spontaneous thief).

# **PICKPOCKETS**

Still rampant on the crowded streets of the world's great cities, the pickpocket —as well as the less dextrous cutpurse—is one of the oldest varieties of thief. The wide range of slang duly attests to his or her ingenuity and longevity.

The best description of a prototype pickpocketing gang can be found in Robert Greene's 'coney-catching' pamphlets of the 1590s,

dealing with the fleecing of the unwary. Here, in lavish detail, he runs down the main operators: the foist, the nip and the stall. The foist, the master pickpocket, who unlike the nip, who uses a knife to cut the purse, uses his fingers to open it and then extract its contents, is deserving of especially lavish description: 'The Foist is so nimble-handed that he exceeds the jugler for agilitie and hath his legiar de maine as perfectly. Therefor an exquisite Foist must have three properties that a good Surgeon should have, and that is, an Eagles eie, a Ladies hand, and a Lions heart. An Eagles eie to spie out a purchase, to have a quick insight where the boung lies, and then a Lions heart, not to feare what the end will be, and then a Ladies hand to be light and nimble, the better and more easie to dive into any mans pocket.' The nip, on the other hand, was a very much inferior artist; indeed the Foist 'refuseth even to weare a knife about him, lest he be suspected to grow into the nature of the nip.' The stall, as one might expect, 'ran interference' for his partners, distracting the victim and making the robbery that much easier. Other 16C terms include the figger (fr. fig: to steal), the hornthumb (fr. the sheath of horn worn by a cutpurse to protect his thumb) and the **snap** (a cutpurse's assistant).

Cutpurse itself emerges in the 17C, as do the synonymous bung-napper, boung-napper and boung-nipper (fr. bung or boung: a purse; the 20C use of bung means a bribe). New synonyms for foist include dive or diver, and file. The combination bulk and file means a pickpocket and his assistant, while buttock and file means a pickpocket and a whore working as a team; the pickpocket robs the client but, unlike the complete ripoff of the classic 'murphy game', the whore does satisfy her client first. The 17C buttock and twang have no such scruples: the whore entices the client and her accomplices beats and robs him; no sex ever takes place. A shoulder-sham is a pickpocket's assistant. Cly or cloy also means pickpocket, although it is as often found as a common thief in his own right. The term originated in cly meaning money, then the pocket in which it is kept, and finally the man who extracts it thence. The next century brings yet more terms: the frisker (fr. frisk: to search through pockets), the clouter (fr. clout: a cloth and thus handkerchief) and fogle hunter (both

of whom specialised in fogles or silk handkerchiefs), the readerhunter or reader-merchant (specialising in readers, or pocket books) and the kiddy-nipper (a variety of cutpurse who actually cut the pockets out of clothes to steal their contents; fr. kiddy: dextrous, nipper: cutter). A natty lad (fr. SE neat) was a young pickpocket while an anabaptist was a pickpocket who had been caught in the act and 'baptised' by being dumped into a pond. The religious motif continues with groaner (fr. his exaggeratedly enthusiastic devotions) and autem-diver (fr. autem: church, and diver\*), both of whom exploited church congregations. Churchwardens, charged with responsibility for distributing alms to the poor were similarly named – to the poor they were as great robbers as any real villain. Their 19C equivalent is kirk-buzzer (fr. kirk: church, and buzzer\*). Autem, one of the core terms of the cant vocabulary comes possibly from a church anthem or possibly from the Yiddish a' thoumme, meaning forbidden church, although the Yiddish may be a later coinage.

To the 19C underworld a mobsman described anyone who used manual dexterity for theft, a category that included both pickpockets and shoplifters. Mayhew, writing at mid-century uses the term to cover buzzers\*, wires\*, prop-nailers\* and thimble-screwers (proprietors of 'find the lady' games). The general vocabulary was much more extensive. Perhaps the most popular term was buzzer, with its variations buzz, buz-bloke, buz-cove, buzfaker, buz-man, all of which played on the image of a bee buzzing around a flower, waiting to extract the nectar. Terms based on buzz include a billy buzman (specialising in silk handkerchieves or billies), a chariot buzzer (working in the still new omnibuses or 'chariots'), a tail buzzer (stealing snuffboxes; from tail: posterior and referring to the back pockets) and a moll buzzer (who picked only women's pockets, as did the moll tooler or tooler; from moll: woman). The adept had overtones of alchemy and the occult, the brief-snatcher worked race-courses (fr. brief: either a wallet or a playing card, and referring to the illegal card games which provided opportunities for theft) the bugger or bug-hunter snatched bugs: breast- or tie-pins. Cly faker, conveyancer, (punning on the legal terminology), hoister, wire, dip, dipper and

dipping bloke, dummy hunter (fr. dummy: wallet) finger-smith, fish hook (fr. fish hooks: fingers), fork and forker (fr. forks: fingers), grafter (US), knuck, knucker and knuckler and leather-merchant (fr. leather: wallet) all meant pickpocket pure and simple. Other specialists were a fobber (removing small change from fob pockets), a propnailer (fr. prop: a tie-pin) and his 20C successor the prop-getter pursued pins and brooches, a stook buzzer, stook hauler or wipe drawer (fr. stook and wipe, both meaning handkerchief) stole silk handkerchieves, and a watch maker preferred watches; a snatcher, as the term implies, was a young inexperienced pickpocket.

Many 19C terms have lasted and are still used, notably dip and wire, but modernity has produced a few extras. Whether through coincidence, or through the gradually accelerating pace, the 19C's relatively leisurely buzzer becomes, in the 20C the whizzer, with its concomitant whiz mob, whiz game and the whiz, all referring to the art of pickpocketing and those who practise it. Other terms include the bumper, the cannon, the pick and a pair of Australianisms, the knockabout man and the legshake artist.

#### **SWINDLERS AND CON-MEN**

While Thomas Harman's Caveat delineated the ranks of villainous beggars, and the tricks they played on the unwary, it is in Robert Greene's Art of Coney-Catching (1591) and its sequels that the urban conmen and swindlers of the 16C make their first appearance as far as their language is concerned. The coney, meaning rabbit since the 13C (and in its Latin root cuniculus, an underground passage, cognate with the origins of cunt\*), was the sucker, the coney-catcher the swindler who, to use modern terminology, 'took' him. As Greene puts it: 'The partie that taketh up the cony, the Setter. He that plaieth the game, the Verser. He that is cosened, the Cony. He that comes into the them, the Barnacle. The monie that is wonne, the Purchase.' The makeup of the swindling team was hardly new four centuries ago, it has altered little over the years. The setter was the first member to meet the mark or victim; once they were talking the verser joined in and enticed the hapless simpleton into

a game of cards, often by claiming to be a friend of one of his friends—and thus a trustworthy figure; with the victim suitably ensnared the third team member, the **barnacle**, later the **barnard**, would appear, posing as an independent individual, with no knowledge of his new companions. Together they fleeced their victim.

As well as coney-catching, Greene expounds upon the 'cross-bit-ing law', 'cosenage by whores', or what, in modern terms would be the **badger** or **murphy game**. In this case the participants were the whore, the **traffique**, the sucker, this time termed the **simpler**, and the **cross-biter**, who beat and robbed the unfortunate punter. It was (and remains) a particularly alluring form of crime, since, unlike robbery or pickpocketing, there were few risks, given the guilt of the **simpler** who would rarely wish to admit to trafficking with a prostitute. As Greene puts it in *A Disputation* (1592), 'Crosbiting now adaies is growne to a marvellous profitable exercise, for some cowardly knaves that feare of the gallows, leave nipping and foysting, become Crosbites, knowing that there is no danger their but a little punishment, at the most the Pillorie.'

Other 16C conmen included the shifter, and the fingerer, both of whom specialised in defrauding young and innocent visitors to taverns and inns, the former by having them pay for a lavish supper, the latter by enticing them into games of chance which, unsurprisingly, they fail to win. 17C terms include the Chaldee (fr. Chaldee: astrologer, and thus seen as being of dubious honesty), the bilk or bilker (a cheat, especially one who does so to avoid paying their debts), a rogue\* and a rogue and pullet (a man and woman working as a team). The pocket book dropper, gold dropper, sweetener (all 17C) and their 18C successors the dropper, drop cove and money dropper, all pursued the same swindle: a wallet, coin or a jewel was dropped in the road, where it would be found by a potential victim. This led to an encounter, after which the victim was either lured into a game or, in the case of the (invariably fake) jewel, the conman persuaded the sucker to buy it, claiming that by rights they should share the profits, but that he, the conman, will sell his share and let the victim have the whole benefit. Fawney-rigging (18C, from fawney: a ring, itself fr. the Irish fain(n)e a ring) is a similar trick, with a sham gold ring as the bait.

As Partridge notes in Adventuring Among Words (1961) (with a justifiable air of self-satisfaction) it is this same fawney that is the root of the modern phoney or fake, a term that, prior to his highlighting of what, ever since, has seemed the very obvious, had baffled generations of inventive, but inaccurate lexicographers. Synonymous terms are ring-dropping and ring-falling, with their concomitant nouns; a further term for one who drops money is a gambler.

The conmen of the period also include the **bite** (18C, a cheat), leatherhead (17C, also a thug), the beau-trap (17C, preying on foolish young aristocrats or beaux), a cross cove (18C) and his 19C peers the cross and crossman, and the chouser (18C) which came from chouse: a swindle; itself based on chiaus or chaus, a Turkish official messenger. The link here comes either from the fleecing in 1609 of of some Turkish and Persian merchants by an agent or chiaus of Sir Robert Shirley, or by the remark that a Turkish messenger is little better than a fool. Specialist swindlers are the queer plunger (18C) who plunges into water and is saved from 'drowning'; his conveniently pre-assembled 'rescuers' then claim money for saving him; the skyfarmer (18C) who tours the country posing as a gentleman farmer fallen on hard times, backed by suitably impressive, if counterfeit papers; the fire prigger (fr. prig\*) and tinny hunter (18C, tinny: fire) who rob people whose homes are burning down, while pretending to give assistance; as George Parker wrote in A View of Society (1781): 'No beast of prey is so noxious to Society, or so destitute of feeling, as these wretches.' The dudder or whispering dudder (18C) sold clothes (especially handkerchiefs) or duds (fr. 15C dudde: a cloak) under the pretence of their being smuggled contraband - they were not while the duffer (18C) similarly gulled those whose tastes ran to 'contraband' brandy or silks (fr. duff: alleged contraband, which has lasted into the 20C, meaning general second-rate or broken). Like the 16C dummerar\* the gagger pretended to be a deaf mute; the christener (18C) faked the identity marks -the 'christening' - on cheap gold and silver watches and like the earlier Chaldee the cunning man (18C) used astrology to 'help' his victims (the term also meant a judge). The macer or mace cove (18C)

obtained goods on credit and never paid for them (cf. long firm); the term comes either from the Yiddish mos: to make money, or the Yiddish masser. a betrayer; thus to mace: to cheat). The thimble-screwer (17C) thimble-rigger and thimble twister (both 18C) were precursors of today's find the lady, three-card monte or shell-game men. 19C synonyms include the nobbler and nobpitcher (often working in a fairground, from nob: to swindle), the pea rigger and pea-man and the charley pitcher, the last of whom, according to Mayhew, takes his name from ceorla or peasant to whom he 'pitches the tale'; however charley may simply be a generic term for peasant, or a euphemism for the derisive churl.

Aside from the plain diddler, the dead nap, the gammoning cove (fr. gammon: both a pickpocket's assistance and the cant language, and thus lies and humbug; the term possibly comes from the OE gamen: to game or sport with) and flat catcher (fr. flatty: an innocent or dupe) the 19C adds several new specialist terms although the specialities in question are more predictable. Like his predecessor the cross-biter, the badger beat and robbed the clients of a confederate whore, although he was not above a little general blackmail. The badger could also be the whore herself. The term had existed since the 17C, although it began life describing 'a Crew of desperate Varlets, who rob and kill near any River, and then throw the dead Bodies therein'. The panel dodger or panel thief (US) worked at the panel game: the robbing of a whore's clients. The term comes from the panel house, a brothel in which the rooms were supplied with false panels that permitted access to the whore's room so that the client can be robbed or beaten up. A bull trap posed as a policeman to extort money (fr. bull\*: policeman); a flying cove promised victims of theft that for a suitable payment they could have their possessions returned; a blackleg or leg is a racecourse swindler (either from game-cocks, which have black legs, or from the black boots such swindlers always wore); the lumberer was a swindling tipster (the term could also mean pawnbroker; in this context the word comes from the medieval Lombard Room, where pawnbrokers and bankers stored their pledges), the bunco-steerer or bunco-man (US) pulled victims into a crooked card game (fr. bunco: a swindle, itself taken

from banco, the 'bank' held by the dealer in a card game). Finally the magsman (possibly from Yiddish machas: a great man), the king of the 19C swindlers, a fashionable swell who appeared as sophisticated a figure as those on whom he preyed. Megsman was essentially a variation, but with less class.

Nothing really changes in the 20C but for the vocabulary. General terms include con artist, bunco artist (US) and fleecer (fr. SE fleece) while among the specialists Australia offers illywhacker (for which no reliable etymology exists), ram and its rhy. sl. synonym amster (amsterdam: ram), both meaning a con-man's stall; the West Indies have alias man, ginnal and samfie; the thrower and slide are members of a three-card monte team; like the older dudder and duffer the slum hustler sells cheap jewellery (slum) pretending that it has been stolen; and a ringer one who steals, improves and then sells cars. The bait, unsurprisingly, is an attractive girl used to lure victims while the hedge is the crowd that gathers around a street con-man. The US grifter is a small-change swindler and thus any small-time gambler, living primarily on his wits. The inside man is a modern-day verser, 'playing the game' rather than luring in the victim.

## THE HIGHWAYMAN

The highwayman, and his distinctly less romantic peer the **foot-pad**, are very much a phenomenon of the 16-18C, especially the latter when such figures as Dick Turpin and 'Captain Lightfoot' (properly James Maclaine) plied their trade. The practice lingered into the early 19C, but accelerating industrialization and urban growth gradually whittled down the heaths and highways upon which a **gentleman of the road** might operate.

For doubtless self-serving reasons the names for highwayman reflect their elevated image from the start. The 16C has a **knight** and a **knight of the road** and a **high lawyer**, who could be either a highwayman or a footpad. Robert Greene, describing the 'High Law, robbing by the highway side' in 1591 sets out the gang: 'The theefe is called a High Lawier. He that setteth the watch, a Scrippet. he that standeth to watch, an Oake. He that is rob'd, the Martin.'

Scrippet possibly comes from that Latin scripsit: he wrote, referring to the scrippet's written instructions, while the oak, upon whose vigilance so much depended, refers to the sturdiness and value of the wood. Footpad itself emerges in the 17C, as do a number of terms referring to the pad\*, or road, a term based on the Dutch pad and Old High German pfud meaning road and cognate with the English path. These include padder and high pad, a term that a century earlier had meant only the highway itself, but had now been extended to the villains who exploited it. Synonymous is high toby, which by the 19C taken a similar journey from object to person. A 19C highwayman was a toby gill, toby gloak (gloak: man, with similar colloquial overtones to bloke; it comes either from the Shelta glokh: man or the Erse oglak: hero) or toby man. A further 17C term is landpirate, although this was virtually SE.

As Hollywood costume dramas have assured us, the 18C was the heyday of highwaymen and the slang acquires a suitably romantic tone. Typical are gentleman of the road and gentleman of the pad; gentleman (like the earlier knight) was an all-purpose appellation, meaning practitioner; thus the variation gentleman of the green baize road: a card-sharper. The villain could also, and perhaps more accurately, be a gentleman's master, referring to his temporary ascendancy over his wealthy victims. Bridle cull (cully: man, usually as fellow or chap) refers to his horse-riding while a colt could be either a youthful accomplice, or an innkeeper who lent him his horses. A collector did just that, while Newmarket Heath Commissioner name-checked a favoured area for robbery. A scampsman derived from scamp, the highway, while a royal scamp was one who never killed or injured. Other terms include St Nicholas' clerk or St Nicholas' clergyman (18C), a spice gloak (19C, spice: to rob, either fr. the German speissen: to eat or fr. speak: to arrest and thus to hold up), and a pull up, giving pull up a Jack: to stop a coach to rob it.

### FORGERS AND COUNTERFEITERS

The earliest forger was the jarkman, cited in Harman (1567). Jark meant a seal (and by the 19C any trinket worn on a watch-chain)

and thus the jarkman created any form of fake documentation: passports, licences, testimonials and the like. The contemporary fambler (fr. famble: a ring, in turn from fam\*: a hand) dealt in fake 'gold' rings. The bene-faker (17C, lit. 'well make') and bene-gybe (17C, fr. gybe: a counterfeit license to beg, later a fake passport) were counterfeiters, initially of documents, later of money. The niggler (18C) clipped money as did the contemporaneous nigger (although this might have been a misprint for niggler). The smasher passed counterfeit coins (fr. smash: counterfeit coins; by 19C smash was rhy. sl. for cash) as did the queer (fr. queer: bad) shover, queer cole (fr. 16C cole\*: money) fencer; the queer bit (fr. 17C bit: money) maker and queer cole maker actually created the fakes as did the 16C voucher (abbrev. of SE avoucher, witness) and the 19C varnisher, whose polishing of his bad coinage looked suspiciously like varnish. Counterfeit was snide (19C) and thus the snide pitcher distributed bad money as did the sourplanter (19C, from sour: counterfeit coins), the shover and the shoful pitcher (fr. the Hebrew shaphell: low or base). The boodler, who passed bad notes, took his name from boodle\*: money; 20C Aus. uses the same term for a corrupt politician. The penman and the scratcher created fake notes: the former so named from his drawing, the latter from the etching of the notes. Modern terminology includes the maker (US) and the cobbler (US), specialising in stocks and bonds as well as the more customary notes and passports. The lay-down merchant and the slinger distribute forged banknotes while the kiter (fr. kite: cheque) and paper hanger pass dud cheques.

# **CARDSHARPS AND GAMESTERS**

Cheating, whether in games of cards or dice, was doubtless well-established by the 16C yet Greene, usually so determined in his efforts to reveal every facet of villainy, becomes strangely reticent when faced with what he calls the 'Cheting Law' and declares, 'Pardon me, Gentlemen, for although no man could better than myself discover this law and his termes, and the names of their Chetes, Bar'd-Dice, Flats, Forgers, Langrets, Gourds, demies and

many other...yet for some speciall reasons, herein I will be silent.'And so he is, although one can illuminate some of the missing terminology. Flats are either cards or, in this context, crooked dice although other than Greene's throwaway reference neither appears until, respectively the early 19C and late 17C. Forgers are also crooked dice (another term apparently specific to Greene), as are barred dice, langrets, demies and gourds. In all cases one or more sides was slightly altered so as to ensure (to the sharper) a predictable roll.

Other 16C terms include the rook (any form of cheat, a term that survives, mainly as a verb meaning to cheat, into the 20C and comes from the allegedly thievish disposition of the bird), a pair of sharpers: the shark and the cogger (fr. cog: a piece of money, which as a verb means to cheat at gambling) and the ambidexter (a shill or 'house player', so called from his 'playing with both hands'). The 17C introduces hawk, needle, needle-point (both of which are 'sharp'), nicker and nickum (thus nick: to win at cards), and wheedle while the 18C has picaro and picaroon (both from the Spanish picaro: a rogue), prinado, which should be Spanish too but the nearest term, prenada (as cited in the OED), pregnant is hard to justify, although Partridge opts for primada, meaning first and thus most skillful, although there seems no real reason for the feminine '-a' ending. In the tradition of Captain Standish\* (the penis) and Captain Hackum\* (a thug) are Captain Sharp and Captain Cheat, both cheating bullies employed by card sharpers.

Broads is the main slang term for cards in the 19C – they have length and breadth but no depth – thus creating a broadsman (a sharp), the broad cove and broad-faker (professional card players) and the broad mob, a team of sharpers. The US broad tosser or broad spieler is a three card monte operator, whose skills (and profits) lie in his ability to deal the three cards in a sufficiently confusing manner. Other terms include the burner (prefiguring the 20C burn: to sell inferior or fake drugs) who cheats the innocent with either cards or dice, the fiddle and the workman (both sharpers), the bonnet and the buttoner (cheats' accomplices, who lure victims into the game) and the crow, who attests to the

honesty of his confederates. The subway dealer (US 20C) works literally underground, a KG is a 'known gambler' in police terminology, a digits dealer is involved in the US numbers racket and an operator runs a gambling game. A baglady (a female version of the bagman: who transports bags of money, especially when making illegal payoffs) is a woman used by numbers racketeers to collect bets and pay off winners. A crossroader is an itinerant card sharp who travels in search of new victims for his cheating skills.

In modern US casinos an agent is a player-cheat who works in collusion with the staff of the casino —the croupiers, pit bosses, etc —but not with its owners; a dice mechanic is a professional cheat; the term, often abbreviated to mechanic, can also be used admiringly of a successful player whether of cards or dice. Animals are professional 'heavies' on the casino payroll, used to collect outstanding debts and ensure that no customers misbehave on the premises; a capper is a shill or a confederate of either the gambler or the casino. In and out of casinos dice cappers are those who make and use shaved or loaded dice, a hand-mucker or hold-out man specialises in palming cards, then holding them out of the game until they become useful to him; a hold-out artist is a gambler or cheat who will never admit how much money he has made out of a game and a proposition cheat never gives his victims even the thought of a win, taking 100% advantage in every game.

# THE FENCE

While not a robber himself, the fence, or receiver plays a vital part in criminal life, buying the stolen property and selling it on. Fence itself, appears c.1698; its etymology is probably a shortening of the SE defence: the fence standing between the criminal and the law. The combinations fencing cully and fencing master followed soon afterwards. The fencing-crib was the house or room from which the fence operated; synonymous are dollyshop (19C, also a pawnshop), leaving shop (19C) and swag shop (early 19C, from swag meaning both a shop and the goods it stocks). The fence as go-between generated a number of terms: Janusmug (19C from Roman god Janus, who had two faces, or mugs), a bag man (20C,

cf. bag lady), bird dog (20C, from the SE bird dog: a retriever, who fetches things) and the placer (20C, who places the thief's loot with a fence). Other fences include the angling-cove (18C, 'one who fishes in troubled waters'), the Adam Tiler (18C, from the German teile: a share or slice), the billy fencer (19C, specialising in stolen metal) the father (mid-19C, on the pattern of uncle: pawnbroker) and the buyer. The family-man has a similar image.

#### THE SHOPLIFTER

Greene has no place for shoplifters, since his real focus is swindlers, but Harman cites the angler and the hooker, both of whom, as their names imply, 'fish' for booty on market stalls or amongst shop displays. These terms were followed in the new century by the lift or lifter who, dressed a servant, would offer to carry one's bags and packages, and then run off -by the 18C he was a simple shoplifter; the Jack in the box or sheep shearer, who 'rings the changes' by bamboozling a merchant and the budge or budget, who stole cloaks from houses; by the 19C the budge was better known for sneaking into unguarded shops and stealing anything he could take. The budge and snudge (17C) were a team: the budge entered an open house and grabbed anything he could; he then passed it to the snudge, who took it to the fence. The clank-napper or clink rigger stole silver tankards while his 19C successor the cat and kitten nipper stole pewter quart (cats) and pint (kittens) pots from inns. The 18C brought the hoist or hoister (still extant, especially in Black America), the pincher (the 18C's Jack in the box), the lob crawler or lob sneak who robbed the shop till (fr. lob: box), his 19C successor was a till sneak; the bouncer who stole while distracting the merchant's attention with his argumentative bargaining, and the avoirdupois-man, who stole the brass weights from shop counters; such theft was the avoirdupois lay. A bob (18C) was that member of a shoplifting team who actually carried off their spoils. Finally the puffer (fr. puff: to praise excessively) would work in a team with a man posing as a gentlemen who would buy some goods and pay cash. At this point the puffer, who happened to be present, explained that the young

man had recently come into a large inheritance which he was eager to squander. When, by chance, the young man returned a few days later he was thus able to secure something very expensive, this time on credit. It would not be paid. The favour was returned, by the ferret or rabbit-sucker, who would gull rich young men into running up huge bills, then dun them for their debts.

As well as the generalised pitch fingers (pitch is 'sticky') and shop bouncer (see bouncer) the 19C offers a number of specialist operators, stealing either from shops or from other places where goods were on display: the bank-sneak (US) took bonds from banks, the pinch-gloak took small articles from jewellers, the pudding snammer stole from cook shops (snammer from Scots snam: to snatch greedily) and the sawney hunter stole from provisioners and grocers (sawney: a flitch of bacon). The scuffle hunter was a dockside pilferer) while a shutter racket worker specialised in boring through a shutter, removing a pane of glass, and reaching through for anything to steal. The dragsman worked the drag lay: stealing from carts or coaches as did the drag-sneak; the peter, peter biter, peter claimer, peter hunter or peter man, stole boxes (peters), luggage and so on; by the 20C peterman reflected the alternative definition of peter: a safe, and meant a safe-cracker; the baggage smasher (US) stole unguarded luggage from railway stations.

The 20C shoplifting team includes the **lugger** (fr. **lug**: carry off or drag) who removes the lifted goods, the **blocker** who acts suspiciously so as to divert the attention of store detectives, and the **skin worker** whose 'skin' (or hands) picks up the goods. A **stickman** is an accomplice who is passed the goods by the actual shoplifter. **Booster**, perhaps the most common contemporary term, at least in the US, refers to the boosting or lifting itself.

## VIOLENCE

Many criminals are thugs, but not all thugs are criminals. For simple men of violence the reader should check INSULTS; this section looks at the terminology of those who rob with violence.

The roarer (17C) was a plain thug, as was the ding-boy (fr. ding: to knock down); both individuals acted as bodyguards or accomplices, providing the 'muscle' for a more skillful villain; the circling boy (17C) was equally tough, but restrained his aggression long enough to help lure a victim into a position where he might then be robbed, with or without violence. The 18C bully-buck, bullycock or vamper deliberately started fights between others, so as to to rob them in the confusion; the sneeze lurker threw snuff in the victim's face, thus blinded he could be robbed; similar was the amuser who threw dust in one's eyes and then ran off; a companion would then appear, and while ostensibly offering his sympathy pick the victim's pockets; the term is a literal interpretation of amuse: to beguile with entertaining tales or to 'throw dust in one's eyes'. The tripper up (18C) robbed a person who had been deliberately tripped up by an accomplice; the snatch cly (cly: money or purse) snatched women's handbags.

More fake sympathy was offered by the stander up (19C) who robbed drunks under pretence of helping them up from the gutter into which they had fallen (or been pushed); the drummer wasted no time on sympathy, he simply robbed drunks, often after helping them to oblivion with a mickey finn or knockout draught; the bearer-up would knock a man's hat over his eyes, then rob him as he struggled to remove it. The garrotting team, who choked rather than actually killed their victims, consisted of the nastyman or uglyman (who actually did the choking) and the backstall, his accomplice. Nastyman soon came to mean any sort of strong-arm man, as did the bester (who would as well use physical threats as he would verbal patter in his efforts to swindle or rob). A silver cooper was a kidnapper, its original use referring to the press-gang or crimps, who kidnapped men to serve in the navy, whether Royal or merchant. Snaffler (18C), smugger, snabbler, and snaggler (all 19C, the last originally a stealer of geese) were all toughs, specialising in snatch-and-grab thefts, while the bobbytwister (19C) would stop at nothing, even killing (twisting) a policeman, A bludger (19C) used a bludgeon and could be either a violent thief or a pimp; the term prefigures its 20C Aus. use as an all-purpose insult. The last 19C term is rampsman, ramper or

ramp, all of whom are robbers with violence; ramp is an abbreviation of the 14C rampant, acting in a violent or threatening manner; in its alternative meaning of swindle (19C) ramp is the root of the 'bankers' ramp' a deliberately engineered financial crisis best-known from its use in 1932, when the Labour government accused the City of creating such a crisis for purely political reasons.

Modern terms for the criminal tough guy include the stick-up artist, the git-em-up guy (20C, a hold-up man who tells his victims 'Get 'em up!'), the jack roller (US), a thief who robs his intoxicated companion and the lush (fr. lush: a drunkard) worker (US) who steals from drunks. The dropper, the hatchet man, the hit man and the trigger man all carry and may use firearms.

#### LIVESTOCK THIEVES

A buffer (17C), buffer napper (17C) or dog buffer (18C) stole dogs (all from 16C bufe\*: a dog), while an abacter (fr. Latin abigere: to drive away) or dunaker (17C) preferred cows (fr. dunnock: a cow). Satyrs (18C) based on the mythological figures, lived as travelling wild men who made their money from stealing cattle. A ticker (fr. 17C tick: credit) would buy cattle (and produce) at a fair for credit and depart with the goods, he would never return with the payment; the rank rider (17C) did much the same with horses: they would travel from inn to inn posing as a knight's or gentlemen's servants and requesting horses for themselves and their master. They would then leave, ostensibly to meet their master. They too would never pay the bill, but take the horses to a distant fair where they could be sold. Other horse thieves included the trailer (16C), the jingler (17C) who also travelled round country fairs, the pad borrower (18C, from pad: a horse, especially a gentle one), an ingler (18C, from SE ingle: a corner, where one discusses the deal), a chaunting cove (19C, from chaunt or chant: to advertise - such criminals advertised their horses in the press) and a queer prancer (18C, either a cowardly horse stealer or an ageing whore). Sheep stealers were variously bleating culls (17C, from bleating chete\*: a sheep), sheep nappers (18C) and fleecyclaimers (19C), and a poultry thief was a walking poulterer

(18C) who stole fowls, then hawked them from door to door, a beaker-hauler or beaker-hunter (19C).

# **IMPRISONMENT**

#### THE PRISON

Although Thomas Harman offers the harmans\* for the stocks his Caveat has no specific entry for prison and the earliest relevant term thus appears to be cage (16C). Clink, originally the specific name of the Southwark prison is also 16C, as is the somewhat literary caperdochy, caperdochio or caperdewsie, all stemming from the king of Capadocia, allegedly rich in slaves but short on cash. The 17C offers blockhouse, originally a fort, quod, also spelt quad and as such probably an abbreviation of quadrangle, although the original quod referred only to Newgate; the iron doublet, the shop (shop meaning a place, as in 'all over the shop', thus the 19C toil shop, where one performed hard labour), the sturrabin or stariben (the Romany term for confine) and the naskin or nask with its variations the Old Nask (the City bridewell) the New Nask (the Clerkenwell jail) and Tuttle Nask (in Tothill Fields).

Coop is an 18C term as is the sheriff's hotel (cf. Akerman's Hotel), rope walk (a nickname for the Old Bailey), bladhunk (a Shelta term for prison), bower (originally Newgate, latterly found in the US and Australia for any jail) and jigger (a cant term for key, with a secondary meaning of whipping post). The 19C is filled with names for prison. The 18C sturrabin was abbreviated to stir (with a possible nod to the stirring of a prisoner's staple diet: porridge, itself a term for prison, although usually for the time one serves) with its rhyming synonym Joe Gurr. Jug, originally stone jug and as such specific to Newgate, was found on both sides of the Atlantic although calaboose (Spanish calabozo: jail) and hoosegow (fr. Spanish juzgado: a tribunal or court of justice) were strictly American. Another import, chokey, came from the Hindi chauki: a four-sided building or a shed. Another name for Newgate, the

college, entered general use, giving college chum, a fellow convict, while the family hotel referred to the family\*: the criminal underworld. Irish theatre (US) referred to the predominantly Irish prison officers (and possibly inmates too) while the UK mill abbreviated the treadmill, as well as generalising Mill, the old nickname for the defunct Insolvency Court; thus go through the mill: to be declared bankrupt. The ironic dry room referred to an invariably damp dungeon, the house that Jack built possibly related to the hangman Jack Ketch, while reesbin is Shelta and raspin Scots. To nick means to arrest; nick thus means prison.

Other terms include the joint (originally Anglo-Irish but since c.1880 strictly US), the pen (US, cf coop), the pokey (US, from the pogey: a workhouse and thus a local house of correction), the slammer (US, from the sound of cell doors), the cross-bar hotel, the bucket (Canada), Texas steel and the tank. A boarding house (US) popularised the old nickname for New York City's Tombs, while the big house originally meant workhouse in the UK, but survives as an US Federal (rather than state) institution. The early 19C prison ships, the hulks moored on the Thames, were the boats, the floating academies or Campbell's academy, while the academy alone was any prison where one did hard labour. The lagging station was the transit prison for those being lagged or tranported; the brig, originally Dutch brig (19C) was a miltary prison – the term rapidly emigrated to the US – as was the glasshouse, originally the glass-roofed North Camp prison at Aldershot. Juvie (US) is a juvenile prison.

The workhouse, a 19C institution designed to control Britain's itinerant beggars, was variously the spinning house or spinniken (fr. Dutch spinnhuis: a woman's house of correction), the spring ankle warehouse (spring ankle: sprained ankle, thus unable to run), wol house or the pan (possibly from Romany pan: to lock or bind). The casual ward where a tramp might stay for a few nights was a strawyard, a spike (fr. the hardness of the beds, the food and the treatment), a twopenny rope (fr. the rope strung across a room, on which bedless tramps could lean and fitfully sleep), the teetotal hotel, and the trib (fr. tribulation).

Two forms of what might be termed open-air prisons should be noted: the pillory, in which the prisoner's head and hands were secured between two sliding, lockable boards, and the stocks, which dealt with the feet, generate a number of terms. They include the wooden ruff, the iron or wooden parenthesis, the penance board, the stoop, the timber, the Norway neckcloth (fr. the Norway fir from which it was made), the nut-crackers and the harmans (cf. harman beck\*). A babe in the wood or an overseer or inspector of the pavement was the man or woman thus imprisoned. The pillory was abandoned in the UK, other than for perjury in 1815; it was finally abolished in 1837; it survived in America, or at least in the state of Delaware, until 1905.

Other obsolete punishments give to be tipped the scroby (fr. scrub?) or tipped the claws (fr. the cat o'nine-tails) (before breakfast): to be whipped before the justices; to shove the tumbler (17C, meaning tumbril) or to play the part of the strong man (17C) both meant to be whipped at the cart's tail; the image is one of pushing both cart and horses. To tease was to flog, thus to nap the teize was to be flogged, although this punishment was in jail, not before the justices.

### SPECIFIC PRISONS

As well as the general terms listed above, prisons have always attracted speicifc nicknames, and as noted some have gone on to become generic terms.

Newgate, London's main prison and 'a house of entertainment for rogues of every description' (Jon Bee, 1823) was variously known as the City College (fr. its site in Old Bailey), the Whitt or Whittington College, Akerman's Hotel and Newman's Hotel (fr. the names of various jailers), the King's or Queen's Head or Inn, the stone doublet, jug, pitcher or tavern. Cold Bath Fields, the harshness of which was such that Coleridge suggested that on seeing it, 'The devil was pleased, for it gave him a hint/For improving his prisons in hell', was the Steel the Bastille, the rhy. sl. Fillet of Veal or Bates' Farm or Bates' Garden (fr. a notorious governor). The Fleet Prison, built soon after the Norman

Conquest and a regular repository for those imprisoned for debt, was the Never-Wag, the Man of War and Number 9, for its address of 9, Fleet Market. The Tothill Fields House of Correction (wherein Hogarth's fictional Rake was imprisoned) was the Tea Garden, the Downs, the Tuttle and the Tuttle Nask. The King's Bench Prison in Southwark, in which literary lights Tobias Smollett and John Wilkes once suffered for their debts, was the Park or Ellenborough Lodge; the spikes that topped its walls were known as Ellenborough's teeth, Lord Ellenborough being Lord Chief Justice between 1802-18.

Horsemonger Lane, outside which Dickens watched a public execution, was the Old Horse, White Cross Street jail was Burdon's Hotel (fr. its jailer), the Clerkenwell House of Detention, once host to the notorious Jack Sheppard and his mistress Edgeworth Bess, was the Tench or the Wells and the Mill Doll was the jail at Bridge Street, Blackfriars. Outside London Melbourne's jail was Castieu's Hotel, that in Edinburgh was the Ten, the Pen or Smith's Hotel, while the Durham prison was the Kitty. More recently Parkhurst, Isle of Wight is The Island, Dartmoor The Moor, Wormwood Scrubs is The Scrubs and Pentonville The Ville. In America San Quentin is Q, the New York City jail The Tombs, Riker's Island, a detoxification centre for drug addicts is The Island, Ossining, NY is Sing Sing and so on. Most state and federal prisons have some kind of shorthand identification among those who are likely to suffer their attentions.

# PLACES IN PRISON AND THE CELLS

Individual prison cells are a relatively new invention, brought into being by the prisons reforms of the 19C. Terms to describe them include the rhyming slang flowery (flowery dell: cell, although its earlier use in the pedlar's Lingua Franca meant no more than a room, especially a room in an inn). The 19C has clinch, shoe, box (the salt box was the condemned cell in Newgate), while the 20C peter starts life two centuries earlier meaning box or chest, and moves on to mean safe (19C) before adopting its current meaning. Cheder comes from a Hebrew term, usually meaning a classroom.

The US has slams (cf. slammer) and Australia the slot. The cell door is a Rory (rhy. sl. Rory O'Moore: door). The open area that runs along the landing outside the cells is known in the US as the range, thus to flash the range is to use a mirror poked through one's cell bars to survey what it happening outside. The 19C polish the king's iron with one's eyebrow—to look through the bars—means much the same.

The solitary confinement cells are the block, chokey, the cooler or damper, Florida (US), the hole or Siberia (US) and to be in solitary confinement is to be behind one's door, buried (US), iced, OP (Canada: off privilege). In UK jails those who volunteer for solitary confinement — usually sex offenders who would not survive in the larger prison population — are on Rule 43. The crazy alley, paddy or pads are the padded cells and to be in the peek is to be under observation. The limbo room (Canada) is a corporal punishment room, but limbo, from the Latin limbus patrum, has meant a prison since at least the 16C. A drunk tank (US, in a local prison or sheriff's office) is a lockup for drunks while the boob (fr. booby hatch: an asylum) is a detention cell.

To be locked up for the night is **carpy** (UK, from the Latin *carpe diem*: enjoy the day!), and men are variously **two-ed up**, **three-ed up** and so on, depending on the numbers forced to share a cell.

## **PRISONERS**

Among the earliest terms for prisoner is queer bird (16C, fr. queer: bad and bird: man), shortly followed by canary or canary-bird (17C) which referred to the keeping of such a bird inside a cage\*; the term re-emerged in Australia in the early-19C, when, applied once more to convicts, it reflected the yellow uniforms that the newly arrived transportees wore when they landed. Other 19C terms were government men, the policevan corps and the devil's regiment (of the line) (coined by Thomas Carlyle mid-19C, who further suggested that 'the post of honour due to this distinguished corps is the Van', ie. the Black Maria.) A transported felon was also a t'other sider or traveller at Her Majesty's expense.

Probably the best-known contemporary term, universal throughout the English-speaking world is con, an abbreviation of convict. Goalbird is well-known as is lag, or old lag, which now means no more than a prisoner, but originally (19C) referred to those who received a lagging: transportation to Australia. Lagging itself gradually altered its meaning: by the late 19C, and after transportation had ceased, it meant simply penal servitude, usually of more than two years, and as such was to more feared than a stretch—then twelve months—although the stretch could be compounded as a three stretch, five stretch or whatever, the number denoting the number of years. A yardbird comes from the prison's exercise yard; the ironic innocent has been locked up and as such is incapable of further crime.

There are also a number of specific terms for prisoners. Fish or new fish is a new arrival, a star (UK) a first offender, while flipflop (US) is a recidivist; a prisoner nearing the end of his sentence is short (US). Aces high, a real man or a right guy (US) is a popular prisoner; a centreman or jointman (Canada) sucks up to the guards - the terms come from the centre of the jail where the guards have their office, or joint: prison - and a stoolie (fr. stool pigeon) is an informer; in the UK a red band (fr. the one he wears) is a trusty. Stool pigeon itself comes from the hunters' practice of tethering a pigeon to a stool in order to attract others. A tough convict is variously an atlas (fr. the mythical giant), OBC ('one brutal convict') and, in the old British Borstals, a daddy. A baron or carvie (he 'carves up' the spoils) trades in the UK prison staple, tobacco or any other lucrative commodity. A sweet kid (US) is a young homosexual while the prison wolf is an older one, as is a knight of the golden grummet (knight of ... dates back to 17C, while golden grummet means anus). The liquid cosh (UK) refers to the major tranquilisers used for restraint; one who has succumbed to prison-induced insanity is stir-crazy or stir bugs. A politician is one who secures privileges and a jailhouse lawyer studies law, usually to test out the institution's rules. A wallflower (UK) is planning an escape; the term puns on those social wallflowers who want to get away from the crowd. The lifer is serving life while in the US a three-time loser is serving mandatory life

after a third conviction; a recluse (US) is a long-term prisoner with no outside contacts. A child molester is a monster, nonce or beast (UK) and short eyes (US, from having 'eyes for' the short, i.e. children) and shut eyes (US, either a synonym for short eyes, or from the molesters instruction, 'Just shut your eyes...').

One one has gone up the river (gone to jail), and begun to do a bit (serve a sentence), a prisoner could blow his copper (US, copper\* meaning policeman, and thus a law-abiding individual or lifestyle) lose remission, possibly after copping a heel (US) attacking an enemy from behind. To become religious is to get the Book or get the glory; to give (one) the office is to initiate a newcomer (originally to tip off); anyone who wants to escape has some rabbit (US), if he succeeds he is over the wall or hill, away, or on the lam. In the claustrophobic world of jail one who invades another's privacy plays too close, while to choose up (US) is to select a homosexual partner and to ride the deck or swap cans (US, can\*: anus) is to have have anal intercourse).

#### PRISON OFFICERS

Of the various terms for prison officer, warder or jailer on offer, the best-known is screw, based on the older slang for key, and synonymous with twirl, which has a similar root. Variations on screw give flue, rhyming slang, and the bent or safe screw: a corrupt officer. Equally widespread in the US is hack, originally meaning a night-watchman. Other warders include the herder (US 20C), the 19C dubber and under-dubber or dubsman and under-dubsman, all of whom take their name from dubs, meaning a bunch of keys. Specific warders include the bully beef, screwdriver or white shirt (UK, senior officers), the bitch's bastard or caser (UK, a severe officer; caser is fr. case: a reprimand), the light of love (rhy. sl.: guv = governor) and the dep (deputy governor). Particulars (US) are external prison authorities. A tube (UK) is an officer who eavesdrops on prisoners, a zombie (UK) is a sour, surly officer, while the Gabriel (UK) is the chapel organist. A warder who suffers from convictitis has a paranoid fear of his charges.

The screw's primary job is to bang up, dub up (dub: key], chubb or miln up the prisoner (the latter pair are the names of locks); to do this he uses the locksmith's daughter, the betty, blacksmith's daughter or wife, the gilkes (a skeleton key), Jack in the box, screw, sket or twirl. A martinet may place a fellow-officer on a ducket (a report) or put the block on (UK: tighten up prison regulations); his victim will probably get the Book (US: to be reprimanded); to ghost (UK) is to move prisoners at night.

#### **IMPRISONMENT**

To send to jail is in the UK to send down, notably from the stairs that lead down from the dock in the Old Bailey's No. 1 court and in the US, and latterly UK too, to send up, an abbreviation of send up the river, which refers to the trip up the Hudson River to the upstate New York prison of Ossining, or Sing Sing. A 19C synonym was hit. To be imprisoned is to be away, inside, in the nick, in chokey, in stir, etc., jugged, on jankers, on the corn (Aus.), under glass or up the river.

Imprisonment in general can be porridge (which one is served on a regular basis, thus doing one's porridge: serving one's sentence), time (with its accompanying saying: 'If you can't do the time, don't do the crime'), bird (rhy. sl. birdlime: time) and jailing (US, thus fellow prisoners jail with each other). A tubbing (19C), a hard bit or hard time is a difficult sentence, while first bird (UK) is one's first sentence. Good time is remission, and in US jails dead time is any imprisonment that does not count towards the sentence. More terms include a jacket (fr. jacket meaning case file or record) and mileage. A criminal record is form (fr. the horse-racing context), PC (previous convictions), previous, a sheet, rap sheet or yellow sheet (all based on the paperwork).

Periods of imprisonment have attracted a number of names. A tray is three months as are three moon, a nag-drag or drag, a sorrowful tale (rhy. sl. three months jail), a spell and a carpet (the assumption was that a prisoner could weave a small carpet in three months). So too was thirteen clean shirts: one every week. A dose is four months. A length and a jade (19C) are longer, if

unspecified sentences. A stretch is a year and half a stretch six months. Nevis and neves (both backsl.) and seven pennorth are seven months or seven years; sixer and twelver six and twelve months; a lagging\* was any sentence of more than two years. To do the book and cover was to be jailed for the rest of one's natural life); to get the knickers or the knickers and stockings (both US) was to suffer a life term. To be on track 13 and a washout (US) was to serve a life sentence: track 13 means bad luck, washout refers to the track having been washed out by rain, thus leaving no chance of turning back.

Tobacco, the staple of the prison economy, can either be smash (19C) or snout (late 19C), which comes from the then illegality of smoking: the prisoner was forced to cup the cigarette in his hand so that he might appear to be rubbing his nose —or snout —when actually he was taking a puff. Other bodily comforts include pussy in a can (US, sardines), shit on a shingle (chipped beef on toast) and whodunnit (UK: meat pie); skilly (19C), an abbreviation of skilligolee, was gruel or broth, a jail loaf is a cob (UK), thus cobitis is a general dislike of jail food, duffer (fr. duff) is pudding in the UK, bread in the US. A scratcher (UK) is a match and a rim slide (US) is a fart (fr. rim\*: the anus).

Other prison slang includes blanket party (US) an initiation rite in which an inmate is rolled in blankets and beaten, a rower (UK) is an argument (fr. row), break (US/UK) an escape and outfit an escape kit; a cell task (UK) is, punning on the real thing, a pin-up (the 'task' presumably masturbation). In the days of corporal punishment the cat o'nine-tails was either the cat, or wicked lady, nine-tail bruser or mouser or number one. A reader (UK) is any reading matter, a kite (otherwise a bouncing cheque), is any form of contraband communication or any form of prison paperwork; a full sheet (UK) is a complaint against an officer while a KB or knockback is a rejection — whether of that complaint, of a plea for parole or of any other request. The hominy gazette (Australia) means rumours; hominy grits being the basis of prison meals, when men could chatter.

A 19C US jail uniform was a zebra (now gone 'legit' and meaning a US football umpire), a flying pasty was a package of excrement

wrapped in newspaper and tossed out of one's window, the obsolete treadmill was the cockchafer, the wheel of life, the everlasting staircase, Jack the slipper, the shinrapper, the stairs without a landing, the stepper or the universal staircase.

# **EXECUTION**

The decline of capital punishment, while it may have benefited the judicial system, at least in liberal eyes, has had one deleterious effect: an abrupt cutting off of what was once a fecund source of slang: the judicial execution, especially those that were carried out in public. While the 20C does have a few terms, notably burn, fry, sit in the hot seat, take the juice or the hot squat (all referring to death in the electric chair) and topping and swinging (for hanging), all of which have lasted as long as did the activities they describe, but they are nothing compared with the substantial listings of an earlier, bloodier era.

Public executions were instituted at Tyburn, near what is now London's Marble Arch, in 1388. There were other sites – Tyburn dealt only with the malefactors of the county of Middlesex - but that jurisdiction effectively dealt with every major London villain. As the vocabulary makes clear, this was the headquarters of judicial death, and until 1838, when the hangman transferred his equipment to the street outside Newgate, it so remained. Public hangings, which at their peak could attract crowds of 100,000 spectators, including in 1849 Charles Dickens, who watched the 'turning off' of the murderous Mr and Mrs Manning at Horsemonger Lane Jail, continued for 30 more years. The last victim was one Michael Barrett, a Fenian responsible for the Clerkenwell bombing of 1868. After that, bowing to public pressure, the executions disappeared behind the prison walls. It would be a further century before the death penalty was abolished in Britain. In America, after a lull during the 1960s and early 1970s, it is back in place.

Death, in the 20C, has attained a degree of taboo that was once accorded to sexuality in an earlier century. It is not merely the end of capital punishment, nor even its banishment to the **topping sheds** of Britain's prisons, that has shrunk the vocabulary. For the 17th and 18th centuries in particular, death was accepted with far fewer qualms, whether of the young, the old, and particularly of the criminal. The slang vocabulary that accrued to the topic, especially as here, in its judicial context, is literally gallows humour.

#### THE GALLOWS

Thomas Harman cites in 1567 chates, chattes and chats for the gallows; the source of all three is the Anglo-Saxon cheat, meaning thing. Cheat itself offers a number of combinations: treyning cheat or trining cheat (16C) possibly a variation on the phrase trine to the gallows, from trine (14C): to go or march, or from trine: triple, and thus referring to the 'triple tree.' Hanging cheat and topping cheat (fr. top: to hang) are both 17C, as is nubbing cheat (fr. nub: neck) which also gives nubbing-cove, the hangman and nubbing-ken, the Sessions-house.

Such terms are essentially practical; with **Tyburn tree** (17C), one moves into the area of imagery. Although hanging at Tyburn was already nearly 180 years old the first permanent gallows was not set up until June 1571. Its first victim was the 'Romish Canonical Doctor' John Story. The great **triple tree**, capable if necessary of dispatching 21 villains at a time, stands menacingly in the background of Hogarth's 1747 engraving of a public hanging. Other 'trees' include the **deadly nevergreen** (18C), the **leafless tree**, (19C), the **three trees**, the **tree with three corners** and the **tree that bears fruit all year round** (all 17C). **Abraham's balsam** (18C) was the Abraham's balm, the old name of the chaste tree, *Vitex Agnus castus*.

After trees come horses, all 17C coinages. They include a horse foaled by an acorn (horse was also the triangle or crossed halberds to which soldiers were tied for floggings), the mare with three legs or the three legged or wooden-legged mare.

Other terms include the 16C ladder, giving in climb three trees with a ladder and mount the ladder: both meaning to be hanged, and groom of the ladder, the hangman. Queer 'em and swing were 18C terms, while the transfer of hangings from Tyburn to Newgate where they continued, first outside and then, until the prison was demolished in 1903, behind its closed doors, is indicated in the City stage and the hotel, an abbreviation of Akerman's Hotel\*. The crap (19C) came from the Dutch krap meaning cramp or clasp, while the derrick (c.1600) paid homage to a contemporary Tyburn hangman. The government signpost (19C) pointed the rogues' path to hell, while the door posts were presumably those of the next world.

Moll Blood (19C) is Scots while prop and stalk (mid-19C) come from showman's jargon and can be found in Punch and Judy shows; the stifler (19C) gives the combinations nab the stifler: to be hanged and queer the stifler, to escape the gallows. The fork comes, anachronistically, from the Latin furca: the fork-shaped Roman gallows, while the widow (18C) is from the French slang, la veuve and the morning drop (19C) puns on a more healthful prescription. Tower hill vinegar (16C) is the swordsman's block, which was replaced with the advent of the noose, by preaching on Tower Hill (16C): to be hanged.

# THE HANGMAN'S NOOSE

The mordant humour of the fatalistic was equally in evidence when it came to the instrument of execution: the noose. Tyburn, as ever, stands in the forefront. The 16C offered the **Tyburn tippet**, **Tyburn check** and **Tyburn pickadill\***, that same form of stiff collar, originally Spanish, that would, in the following century, give a name to the London thoroughfare Piccadilly. The **Tyburn tiffany** (17C) took its name from a transparent gauze muslin, often used as a headcover.

The 16C also had Sir Tristram's Knot and Sir Andrew's Knot (referring perhaps to a pair of hanging judges, the halter (thus halter-sack: a gallows bird) and neckweed, a synonym for hemp, which was used for the rope itself. Other 'hempen' terms emerge

in the 18C:the hempen collar, hempen cravat, hempen croak, hempen garter, hempen necktie, hempen habeas, hempen candle and hempen circle; a hempen widow had lost her husband to the noose, and those who died of a hempen fever had been hanged. Further 18C terms include the sheriff's picture frame, a tight cravat and an anodyne necklace, originally a form of medicinal amulet and based on the original definition of anodyne as soothing pain, in this context that of a mis-spent life. The caudle or, ironically, caudle of hempseed—originally gruel spiced with wine or ale and given to the sick, and especially to women in labour—was another form of 'painkiller'.

Finally and logically, a number of terms refer to the neck: necklace (17C); scrag, scrag squeezer and squeezer (all 18C) were all based on scrag, meaning neck; necktie (18C), neckcloth and neck squeezer (both 19C).

#### TO BE HANGED

Many terms meaning to be hanged are simply combinations of those above plus a verb. Thus one climbs the stalk, climbs or leaps from the leafless or the triple tree, swings, is nubbed, wears hemp or an anodyne necklace, a hempen collar, cravat and so on. Similarly one rides the horse foaled of an acorn, one is stretched, topped, scragged, and much more. There are, however, a number of new terms worthy of mention.

Perhaps the most elaborate is the 18C's to dance or shake one's trotters at Beilby's ball where the sheriff plays the music or pays the fiddlers. As Grose remarked in 1796 'who Mr Beilby was, or why that ceremony was so called, remains with the quadrature of the circle, the discovery of the philosopher's stone and divers other desiderate as yet undiscovered', but there exist a number of suggestions. The most obvious is that Beilby was a well-known sheriff; a second is that beilby is a mispronunciation of Old Bailey, the court in which so many villains were sentenced to death. The third, and that espoused by Eric Partridge, is that beilby refers to the bilbo, a long iron bar, furnished with sliding shackles to confine the ankles of prisoners, and a lock by which to

fix one end of the bar to the floor or ground. Bilbo comes from the Spanish town of Bilbao, where these fetters were invented.

Dancing and kicking are twin leitmotifs of judicial extermination. One might dance at the sheriff's ball and loll out one's tongue at the company, dance or cut a caper upon nothing, cut one's last fling, do the Paddington (18C) or Newgate (19C) frisk (in a hempen cravat), dance the Newgate hornpipe (without music), dance at Tuck 'em Fair (18C, from tuck: to hang). Similarly one could kick the wind (with one's heels), kick the clouds (19C) kick before the Hotel door (fr. Akerman's hotel\*), kick away the prop, or wag hemp in the wind. Morris too presumably came from the dance.

Tyburn, again, has its place and 16C terms include preach at Tyburn cross, fetch a Tyburn stretch and make a Tyburn show. A Tyburn show, Tyburn jig or Tyburn stretch was a hanging, just as Paddington Fair was the hanging day, Tyburn being sited in what was then the village of Paddington.

The choking aspect of hanging provided some grim humour: catch or nab the stifles, (17C) to have a hearty choke with caper sauce for breakfast (18C, a laboured pun on artichoke) and take a vegetable (19C, once again an 'artichoke') breakfast. One could cry cockles (18C, from the choking noises). Other terms include to die in ones boots or shoes (two centuries before the phrase became a staple of the US Wild West), to leave the world or to die with cotton in one's ears (19C, Cotton being a Newgate chaplain), and to die of a hempen fever or a hempen quinsy (18C). One could also marry the widow, bless the world with one's heels (16C), walk up ladder lane and down hemp street (19C, nautical: hanged at the yardarm), walk backwards up Holborn Hill, a reference to the traditional journey to Tyburn from Newgate, which is also the origin of the phrase go west. One could die in a horse's nightcap, be stabbed with a Bridport dagger (the best variety of British hemp was grown near Bridport) or go off with the fall of the leaf (a pun on the leaves of the drop and the dead leaves the fall from a natural, rather than judicial 'tree'. Finally the US lanter (fr. the French revolutionary exhortation 'À la lanterne!') meant to hang from a lampost,

while whittle meant to confess on the gallows (16C, from whiddle: to confess, which in turn derived from whid meaning a cant 'word' and thus a lie). A horse's nightcap was the cap pulled over the condemned man's head prior to his death.

#### THE HANGMAN

General terms for the hangman include the dancing master (17C), the cramping cull (fr. cull or cully: a man, or, specifically, a constable), the topsman and the sheriff's journeyman (all 18C), but three individual executioners earned their own immortality and became generic terms in their own right. The most celebrated is still Jack Ketch (sometimes written Catch or Kitch), who was the common executioner from c.1663-1686. Partly on account of his barbarity at the executions of Lord Russell, the Duke of Monmouth, and other political offenders, and partly perhaps from the obvious links with the SE catch, his name became widely known. When it was given to the hangman in the puppet-play of Punchinello, which arrived from Italy shortly after his death, his immortality was assured. Kindred terms are Jack Ketch's kitchen, that room in Newgate where the hangman boiled the quarters of those dismembered for high treason and Jack Ketch's pippin: a candidate for the gallows.

Derrick has been cited above, while the gregorian tree, the gallows and the gregory, the hangman, come from one Gregory Brandon, who worked as executioner under James I, to be succeeded by his son Richard, better known as 'Young Gregory'.

# DEATH

Amassing the terms that relate to death, dying and the various impedimenta – the coffin, the funeral and the like – it is hard to avoid the fact that as opposed to the language of judicial executions (see Execute), where the blackest of humour is constantly on display, death 'by natural causes' (or at least not at a rope's end or

via some other compulsory agency) seems to give slang coiners a certain pause for reflection. Perhaps the subject is just too serious. What one finds, as will become apparent, is a good deal of material skating along the thin line that in this context at least, runs between proper slang and the kinder world of euphemism.

#### DEATH

Termination is the name of the game, and the words for death echo that finality. The last farewell, last goodbye, last muster and last roundup all suggest the solemnities of a final departure, as does Raymond Chandler's long goodbye (the title of his novel, published in 1953). Chandler also offers the big sleep (this eponymous novel appeared in 1939), a term that seems to reek of gangland authenticity, but which the oil executive-turned-novelist created in his own study. As in many of its terms, death-related material grabs hold of the imagery of other, livelier activities to create its purpose-built vocabulary. Thus curtains and the final curtain evoke the stage (with an unspoken 'La commedia é finita' as a famous last word), fadeout comes from the movies while lights out evokes a dormitory or perhaps a barracks, and the end of the ball game the culmination of a baseball encounter. Kiss off, push off and send off are logical enough - each implies departure but kickoff is slightly paradoxical: as much as finality it implies a beginning, it is, as it were, the start, not the end of the ball game. Only the big chill and cold storage present a genuine whiff of the morgue. As for the actual figure of death he is relatively unrepresented. The Grim Reaper, Old Mr Grim (fr. grim: a skeleton) and the Old Floorer (whence he knocks you) are the only names that slang can suggest.

### THE CORPSE

'A dead wife is the best cold meat in a man's house,' declared Francis Grose in 1785 and cold meat, seemingly the earliest slang term for corpse is possibly the harshest. There is little euphemism there. It also led to a number of combinations: cold meat box (1820, a coffin), cold meat cart (1820, a hearse), cold meat train (mid-

19C), a train that stops at a cemetery, although officers at Aldershot thus christened the last train, which brought them back to barracks from a night's indulgence in London) and, during World War I, cold meat ticket: an identity disc (US dogtags) by which a corpse could be most easily identified.

Other terms for corpse included **goner** (c.1847, and imported from the US to UK), **dead meat** (mid-19C) and **croaker**, which meant a dying person, a corpse, and the doctor who had failed to save the first from becoming the second. It is as a doctor that **croaker** still exists, especially in the world of narcotics, where a **writing croaker** is a doctor who writes narcotics' prescriptions without asking questions — albeit for an inflated fee. Still in the surgery, or at least the hospital, **pickles** or **dead pickles** was what 19C medical students called the corpses brought in for dissection.

A stiff 'un (1823) and a stiff (mid-19C) have survived reasonably well, especially in the abbreviated form; the former version also described a horse which, for whatever reason, failed to run as expected. To cut up stiff was to leave a large estate. Rags and bones and wormbait both indicate the fate of the buried body, while a flounder (1870) meant a drowned man and a dab a drowned woman; the contemporaneous rhy. sl. flounder and dab, however, meant a cab.

# THE CEMETERY

The cemetery became a bone yard or bone orchard during the late 19C, in time for World War I's grim nicknaming of the battle of Neuve Chapelle (1915) with the same phrase: so heavy were the casualties that it became impossible to dig into the ground without disinterring bones. Americans had marble orchard from the same period. The punning landed estate confers a degree of (spurious) dignity, while Darby's Dyke smacks of jail, coming as it probably does from darby's fair, the day a prisoner was transferred from one jail to another, to be prepared for his trial; this term, in turn, has its roots in darbies, meaning handcuffs. The best known of slang cemeteries, however, is the watery one: Davy Jones' locker. At best Davy Jones represents the spirit of the sea, at worst he is

the ocean's own devil; either way it is in his 'locker' that drowned seamen are stowed. The identification was first printed by Smollett in *Peregrine Pickle* (1751). The etymology remains obscure, but Partridge suggests that 'Jones' refers to 'Jonah' whose own 'locker' was the belly of the whale; Davy, it is proposed, may have been added by Welsh sailors.

#### THE BURIAL

As misogynistic as ever, slang terms a funeral a scold's cure; the only alternative term being a black job (which was practiced, c.1850, by experts in the black art, i.e. undertaking). Burying a body is to plant it (18C), to put it six feet under, to send home in a box or to be put to bed with a shovel. Those thus interred are taking a ground sweat (17C) or going to grass with their teeth upwards. The coffin is a six-foot bungalow, pine or wooden overcoat (19C), or a wooden kimono. Some version of a wooden 'garment' has existed since the 18C, starting with wooden doublet (1761), and progressing through wooden habeas (18C), wooden surtout (1780) and wooden ulster (19C). In the same spirit a wooden casement or wooden cravat described the 18C pillory, while those who were buried gained a wooden suit. The concrete overcoat, a product of gangster killings and probably coined by journalists rather than the gangsters themselves, emerged in the 1920s.

# TO DIE

Although the 19th century offered go aloft, go up, join the great majority and join the angels and spiritualist euphemism has cross over, up references to heaven are relatively rare in the list of slang terms that mean 'to die'. Gambling, sport and the sea have a far more substantial representation. The former, for instance, has to be thrown for a loss, cash in one's chips, crap out, throw a seven, have one's chips, have one's number come up, pass in one's checks or chips, put one's checks in the rack, throw in one's cards, throw in one's hand—all of which come either from cards or the game of craps dice and emerge subsequent to the

mid-19C. Sport, similarly, offers strike out, drop the cue, peg out (19C), hang up one's harness, jump the last hurdle, go to the races (19C), throw in the sponge and take the long count, drawn variously on baseball, snooker, cribbage, horse-racing and boxing.

The sea is especially fertile in images of demise. Aside from the sailors' own go to Davy Jones' locker, a number of terms with a nautical background are equally popular amongst landlubbers. The majority come from the mid-19C, when many more sailors stood 'in peril on the sea', and they include cut or slip one's cable. keel over, lose the number of one's mess, give up the ship, drop off the hook and sling one's hook; drowning as such engenders go feed the fishes and turn into fish food. Answer the last roll-call and answer the last muster may have nautical origins too, although answer the last round-up is definitely a product of dry land -notably the American West, which is also the source of bite or kiss the dust. America too furnishes buy the farm, a World War II coinage which refers to the wish of US aviators to retire from combat missions, buy a farm and settle down. The term referred ironically to those whose 'retirement' came somewhat sooner than they might have desired. To go West, however, has nothing to do with land of cowboys and Indians; rather it refers to the last trip an 18th century villain would make, moving from his or her cell in Newgate (now the Old Bailey) westward towards the gallows at Tyburn (now Marble Arch). The term also has some flavour of the metaphorically 'setting sun' which descends in the West. Although the majority of such underworld terms are to be found under EXECUTION, a couple of general phrases also reflect the moment of execution: get it in the neck (fr. an executioner's blade) and kick the wind (as one hangs).

The act of dying draws on a wide variety of sources for its imagery. The animal kingdom offers hop the twig (19C) and go belly up (like a dead fish), while nature has drop off the twig (like a leaf); domesticity, especially in the context of eating, gives lay down one's knife and fork (19C), go for one's tea, hand in one's dinner pail and hang up one's hat; stick one's spoon in the wall (19C) has a neat finality, but its etymology remains a mystery.

What may be the ultimate in food-related images is kick the bucket, which dates back to 1570 and has been accorded two, not wholly dissimilar origins. The first refers to a 16C method of slaughtering a pig: the animal is suspended from a beam by the insertion of a piece of bent wood behind the tendons of its hind legs; this piece of wood is known as a 'bucket'; the dying animal naturally kicks out at the bucket. The second is more marginal, and refers to an ostler working at an inn on the Great North Road who killed himself by hanging; to gain the necessary drop he stood on a bucket, kicking it away as required. Other metaphors are conk out (c.1917, like an engine), snuff it (hence today's supposed 'snuff movies'), take an earth bath (19C), take the big jump and come to a sticky end (the 'stickiness' is that of blood).

The physical act of dying is reflected in croak (fr. one's death rattle), turn up up one's toes, curl up one's toes (and die) and cock up one's toes (19C); resignation underlines call it a day, call it quits, turn one's face to the wall and give up the ghost, while the body's decay is echoed in feed the worms, push or kick up daisies and kick up dust. Departure is seen in kick off, check out (as in leaving a hotel), bow out (with a theatrical echo of curtains, above), take a powder, pop off (18C), quit and slam off. Indeed, given the essentially colloquial nature of such terms, there are few verbs for leaving that cannot (and have not) been recruited to serve as softeners for death.

Finally come pop one's clogs (fr. pop: pawn; the inference is that only in extremis would one 'pop' one's clogs, given the role they play as indispensable footwear), and go to Peg Trantum's (17C, but Peg Trantum is still extant in East Anglian dialect as a 'hoyden or tomboy'). To be dying, rather than actually dead adds a few extra phrases: to be on one's last legs, to have one foot in the grave, to have one's number come up, to be pegging out, and to be measured for a funeral sermon.

### SUICIDE

Suicide, it might be presumed, requires even more careful euphemism, but in fact the terminology tends to the tough, often

borrowing from a vocabulary more usually associated with murder: do oneself in, bump oneself off, turn off one's lights or turn out one's lights, kiss oneself goodbye, wipe oneself out and top oneself (19C, fr. top: kill, especially when the 'top' or head is either removed or placed within a hangman's noose). Other phrases include do the Dutch (19C, which originally meant to run away and, racial stereotyping aside, underlines the feeling that suicide is 'the coward's way out'), take the easy way out (cowardice again), gorge out (to jump from a high cliff) and have a catfish death (drown oneself). Perhaps the most exotic is take a Brodie: this refers to one Steve Brodie, a 23 year-old New York saloonkeeper who on July 23, 1886 leaped some 41.5 metres (135 feet) from the city's Brooklyn Bridge in order to win a \$200 wager. He survived the fall and was scooped out of the East River by a friend in a small boat. His exploit coined two slang phrases: the first, since he survived, was 'doing a Brodie', meaning attempting a dangerous stunt. The second, perhaps boosted by the fact that the police briefly charged him with attempting suicide, was that listed above. Not everyone was impressed, anyway: the boxing champion Jim Corbett was told that Brodie had jumped over the bridge; when he discovered the truth he snorted, 'So? Any fool can jump off a bridge.'

#### TO BE DEAD

Death's adverbial state, 'dead', naturally modifies some of the verbs listed earlier, but takes the opportunity to expand the grim lexicon somewhat further. Those for whom all bets are off, who have been put to bed with a shovel, whose hash is settled, whose number is up and whose race is run, who are out of their misery, down for the last count and moved out of the picture have gone belly up, across the river, pegged out, popped off, gone west, checked out, croaked, kicked off and kicked the bucket. All up and done for they are pushing up daisies, all washed up, wasted, counting worms, dead as a doornail, cold, scragged, smabbled and snabbled. Gone for six, they're grinning at daisy roots, jacked in, slated, throwing sixes or a seven (a throw of twelve in craps dice is a loss, as, when trying

to make a given 'point', is one of seven). They have, to return to religion, gone trumpet-cleaning — the trumpeter in question being the angel Gabriel. Once again, this is but a selection, the potential vocabulary is open to euphemists everywhere.

#### GONE FOR A BURTON

Although the OED pontificates that 'None of the several colourful explanations of the origin of the expression is authenticated by contemporary printed evidence.' gone for a Burton remains one of the most tantalising slang expressions, Britain's version of America's OK\*, as it were, and for all the OED's self-denial, a trawl through the possibilities is simply too tempting to resist.

There is no argument as regards what the phrase, used invariably in the past tense (gone for a Burton), meant: initially it was dead, killed either during some sortie or in a dogfight; latterly, post 1941, it came to mean missing, whether in the air or not. Although there are some claims for its existence during World War I, when Burton was supposedly derived from an elision of the words 'burnt 'un' (the fate of many young aviators), most lexicographers, including Partridge, an expert on every aspect of 1914–18 slang, opt for the following conflict and the magisterial OED offers no citation before that from the New Statesman, dated August 1941. From thereon in, all is confusion.

Partridge in the 7th edn. of the DSUE, and Paul Beale in the 8th, suggest 1. a euphemism: going for a glass of Burton ale; 2. Burton-on-Trent is rhy. sl. for went, as in 'went west' (cf. go west); 3. Burton ale is heavy, as is a burning aircraft as it crashes to the ground; 4. the Burton refers to the suits made by Montague Burton. This ties in neatly with descriptions of coffins as wooden overcoats, wooden kimonos and the like, but would conclusively disqualify any World War I origins, since Burtons had yet to appear on the High Street; 5. To confound the whole issue even further, during World War II the RAF used a number of billiard halls, invariably sited above Burton shops, as medical centres. Those who attended such centres had 'gone for a Burton'; the black joke was that such treatment was more likely to kill than cure.

Other suggestions, vouchsafed by correspondents to BBC Radio 4's Enquire Within brought up the large-scale inter-war advertising campaign for Burton's Ales (which, paæ Partridge, were apparently not that heavy). The campaign featured on posters 'several scenes depicting a Burton Ale house in the background and a tableau in the foreground where a principal character was obviously missing. An example is a broken-down car, bonnet up, distraught lady standing beside it, male character disappearing up the road towards the pub.' The copy line for this and similar pictures was 'He's gone for a Burton'. Only after the advertising campaign was it picked up by participants in the military one.

A second correspondent noted that Montague Burton's halls were used for morse aptitude tests, not medical checkups, and going for a Burton meant failing such a test, 'made,' he noted 'more difficult by open windows and passing trams.' It was also claimed that the **burton** came from seafarers' jargon, referring to the stowing of a barrel athwart rather than fore-and-aft. Such stowage was notoriously unsafe in a rough sea, and a rolling barrel could be a genuine threat to a sailor deputed to tackle it. Thus this going for a Burton meant risking death.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AA: Afro-American Aus.: Australian abbrev.: abbreviation backsl.: backslang cf.: compare fr.: from Fr.: French Gk.: Greek Heb.: Hebrew Lat.: Latin orig.: originally

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yob 131

ying-yang 65

qv.: which see rhy. sl.: rhyming slang Rom.: Romany Yid.:Yiddish \*: see further entry





## A Valuable Reference for the Historical Development of Slang

The joy of slang lies in its inventiveness and diversity. Finding different terms with which to discuss money, sex, alcohol, has exercised humankind's verbal ingenuity almost since we learned to speak. Slang Through the Ages tackles its subject theme by theme, taking words of standard English such as "hangover," "gambler," and "head" and traces the development of their slang equivalents over the past 500 years and throughout Britain, the United States, Australia, and beyond.





