



Tuesday's Tip

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World Wide Words

July 15, 2014

Oxford English Dictionary contributor and noted author [Michael Quinion](#) offers incisive articles on the unique words, phrases and expressions of the English language. A weekly e-newsletter helps visitors stay abreast of the latest updates.



WORLD WIDE WORDS

Investigating the English language across the globe

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About this site

The English language is forever changing. New words appear; old ones fall out of use or change their meanings. *World Wide Words* tries to record at least some part of this shifting wordscape by featuring new words, word histories, the background to words in the news, and the curiosities of native English speech.

This is the archive of pieces that have appeared in the [free newsletter](#). Weekly issues include much more than appears here, including discussion by readers, serendipitous encounters with unfamiliar language, and tongue-in-cheek tut-tuttings at errors perpetrated by sloppy writers.

New this week

Bat an eyelid The bat in the expression turns out to have nothing to do with nocturnal flying mammals. And likewise it's unconnected with table-tennis, cricket, baseball or any other game in which a bat ...
[\[Read the whole piece\]](#)

Closet versus Cupboard My recent discussion of *skeleton in the closet/cupboard* led, as I expected, to numerous messages about the scope and meaning of these words in American and British ...
[\[Read the whole piece\]](#)

Randomly chosen

Hodening A *hodening* was a mumming or masquerade on Christmas Eve in Kent. This ancient custom died out around 1910 but has been revived, with several groups performing in East Kent towns ...

Last updated 12 July 2014.

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Questions and Answers section index

Pieces originate in questions asked by subscribers to the World Wide Words newsletter and are as eclectic as you could wish.

A A flea in one's ear; Abbreviation 'lb' for pound; Abracadabra; According to Cocker; Acid test; Across the board; Adam's off ox; Aeriaded; Aga saga; Agitory; Agog; Ahead of the curve; Ahoy!; Aksed versus asked; All mouth and trousers; All my eye and Betty Martin; All wool and a yard wide; All-singing, all-dancing; Ambulance at the bottom of the cliff; Amn't; Andrew; Apostrophes; Apple of one's eye; April; Arfanarf; Argy-bargy; Arms akimbo; Artefact versus artifact; As the crow flies; Ascian; Ash; Asynartesia; At sixes and sevens; At the drop of a hat; Aunt Sally.

B Back to square one; Bad cess; Bail out; Bald-faced, boldfaced or barefaced?; Balls-up; Banter; Barbarian; Barbecue; Barber's cat; Barking mad; Basket case; Bat an eyelid **NEW**; Bated breath; Bear up; Beat; Beat the band; Beck and call; Bee's knees; Beefing; Beg the question; Beggar on horseback; Beggar-my-neighbour; Believe you me; Bells and whistles; Besmitten; Bespoke; Best bib and tucker; Between versus among; Beyond the pale; Big Apple; Big cheese; Big girl's blouse; Big pond; Big shot; Bill; Bint; Birds and the bees; Bistro; Bitter end; Black Maria; Blackbirding; Bless your cotton socks; Blighty; Blind Freddie; Blivet and nitroid; Blizzard of horseradish; Blockbuster; Bloke; Blot one's copy book; Blow the gaff; Blower; Blue; Blue blood; Blue murder; Blue-plate special; Bob's your uncle; Bobby; Bog-standard; Bohemian; Boilerplate; Bold as brass; Bonce; Boodle bag; Books without the letter 'e'; Boot; Boot camp; Bootleg; Bossy; Bounty hunter; Box of birds; Boxing Day; Boycott; Bozo; Brand spanking new; Brass monkey weather; Brass

Weird Words section index

The word weird in this section is interpreted broadly to mean words that refer to obscure or outlandish subjects, are in themselves rare, or which look odd.


A Abacot; Abditory; Abecedarian; Abigail; Able-whackets; Absquatulate; Acersecomic; Acronychal; Acrophony; Adipocere; Adoxography; Adumbrate; Adust; Agelastic; Agrestic; Alamagoozlum; Albertopolis; Alegar and beeregar; Alexipharmic; Aliment; All Sir Garnet; Allision; Ampersand; Anadiplosis; Analemmatic; Anamorphosis; Anatine; Anfractuosity; Ansated; Ansible; Antelucan; Anthropodermic; Anti-fogmatic; Antimacassar; Apocope; Aposematic; Aposiopesis; Apotropaic; Apozem; Apricate; Arenaceous; Argosy; Aristology; Asparagus; Astrobleme; Astrobolism; Ataraxy; Atrabilious; Attercop; Austringer; Autohagiography.

B Backronym; Bafflegab; Balderdash; Balductum; Banausic; Bankrupt; Bant; Baragouin; Barmecide; Barometz; Bathykolpian; Bedizened; Beghilos; Behove and behoove; Bejuggle; Bellwether; Betwixt; Bezoar; Blackguard; Blackmail; Blatherskite; Blatteroon; Blood and thunder; Bloviate; Blurb; Bodacious; Bodger; Bombilation; Bonzer; Boondoggle; Bootless; Borborygmus; Boscage; Boustrophedonic; Bowdlerise; Bridewell; Brimborion; Brobdingnagian; Bromopnea; Brosiering; Brummagem; Bruxer; Burgoo.

C Cachinnatory; Cacoethes; Cacography; Cad; Cadastral; Cadge; Caitiff; Calenture; Callipygian; Callithumpian; Caltrop; Camelion; Cancrine; Candent; Cantankerous; Cantrev; Carabidologist; Carphology; Carwhichet; Carwiche; Cascabel; Cataglottism; Cataract; Catchpole; Catoptromancy; Cello scrotum; Cenatory; Cento; Ceraunograph; Charabanc; Chatoyant; Cheapskate; Cheat-bread; Chicanery; Chiliastic; Chissicking; Chrestomathy; Chronogram; Chthonic; Chuck-farthing; Chucklehead; Circumbendibus; Clerihew; Clinquant; Cockaigne;

Boondoggle

A sample entry of what you'll find on the site.

Pronounced /'bu:ndɒg(ə)l/ 

This typically North American term for an unnecessary or wasteful project is often applied in two specific ways, either to describe work of little or no value done merely to appear busy, or in reference to a government-funded project with no purpose other than political patronage. It can also be used for an unnecessary journey by a government official at public expense.


Part of its oddity lies in its sudden emergence into public view in an article in the *New York Times* on 4 April 1935. This had the headline “\$3,187,000 Relief is Spent to Teach Jobless to Play ... Boon Doggles Made”. The “boon doggles” of the headline turn out to be small items of leather, rope and canvas, which were being crafted by the jobless during the Great Depression as a form of make-work. The article quoted a person who taught the unemployed to create them that the word was “simply a term applied back in the pioneer days to what we call gadgets today”. He suggested that boondoggles had been small items of leatherwork which were made by cowboys on idle days as decorations for their saddles.

The word instantly became famous. It seems that Americans had been feeling the lack of a good word to describe unnecessary, wasteful, or fraudulent projects and leapt upon it with delight.

It had actually been around for some years, though attracting little notice

Gadzooks

Gadzooks!

Pronounced /gɒdzu:ks/ 

We owe this week's word to HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. He has been widely reported recently as uttering this imprecation — an exclamation of surprise or annoyance — upon seeing a new portrait of himself by Stuart Pearson Wright in which he is bare-chested, with a bug on his shoulder and a plant growing out of his finger. “Gadzooks!”, he commented. “As long as I don't have to have it on my wall.” (The organisation that commissioned the portrait, the Royal Society of Arts, clearly felt similarly, since they rejected it outright.)

How very eighteenth-century of HRH to choose this word to express his feelings, since nobody but he these days utters this word other than as a conscious attempt at humorous archaism or as a cheap way to invoke a period. This latter trick is so derided that historical novelists who introduce words like *prithee*, *zounds*, *gramercy* and *gadzooks* into their dialogue are sometimes accused by British literary critics of indulging in *gadzookery*.

Not only modern authors, since by 1869, when R D Blackmore wrote *Lorna Doone*, set in the previous century, the word was already out of fashion: “ ‘Gadzooks, Master Pooke,’ said I, having learned fine words at Tiverton; ‘do you suppose that I know not then the way to carry firearms?’ ” But we must excuse Tobias Smollett, for he published *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* in 1751, when the word was at the height of its popularity: “ ‘What!’ cried the painter, in despair, ‘become a singer? Gadzooks! and the devil and all that! I'll rather be still where I am, and let myself be devoured by vermin.’ ”

Gadzooks is usually said to be an alteration of *God's hooks*, that is, the nails by which Christ was fastened to the cross. It's one of a set of late



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About the newsletter

The newsletter appears every Saturday. It is free.

Each issue includes an eclectic mixture of pieces that may focus on words in the news, new words, weird words, book reviews and answers to readers' questions as well as discussions and updates on previous issues. Subscribers read pieces a week before they are added to the website.

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