The Heather Collection - Cultural notes

The stories in the Heather Collection are set in England and there are some specific characteristics of the school system, as well as other features of English life and language, which it may be helpful to the reader to be aware of.

Story codes "m" and "f".

Because English comprehensive schools routinely include ALL pre-university students, up to the age of 19, I have redefined the m and f codes here to include the all students in this collection. I feel that to use M or F for school students would give most readers an inaccurate initial impression of the nature of these stories. All of the students portrayed as being involved in sexual activity in these stories are aged at least 18 years old.

EDUCATION

The Headmaster,

often abbreviated to "Head", is the equivalent of the School Principal. Although in theory answerable to school governors, the Education Authority (Local) and the Department for Education and Skills* (National), in practice the headmaster is "God", to the students at least.

A female "Head" is still universally known as a Headmistress, even in these politically-correct times. The gender-neutral term, Head Teacher, is becoming more widely accepted. As yet, however, headmaster and headmistress remain the usual titles.

LEA

is a general abbreviation for any specific Local Education Authority. In principle an LEA is supposed to be apolitical; the reality, however, is that an LEA is often highly politicised, with an agenda opposed to the central government of a different political persuasion. LEAs are responsible for allocating local education funding. When head teachers are tasked by the political party elected nationally but funded by a rival political party locally, they can often find themselves "between a rock and a hard place".

Assembly.

Now very uncommon in senior schools, but I have included it as a useful device in the stories as I wanted a way to get the whole school together at various times in the story. Assemblies were once (centuries ago) religious ceremonies as the earliest schools were founded by churches. They may still today contain hymns and a prayer, but are more likely to be a way to make announcements to the whole school or for short performances. They may on occasion even provide a platform for a visiting lecturer.

Comprehensive School.

A large secondary school taking children of all abilities as opposed to having separate "grammar" schools for the "brighter" pupils as was the previous educational model. In many (but not all) cases, comprehensive schools take an age range of children from 11 up to and including 18 or 19, the normal age in England to start university. They may be very large with thousands of pupils, although many pupils transfer to specialist "6th form colleges" at age 16 or 17. The MINIMUM legal school leaving age is 16, so many leave school at this stage.

Although this is a much wider age range than American high schools, there is often little or no contact between the older and younger pupils. In some cases separate age groups may be in different parts of one building or even in different buildings. This is the reason why it is realistic for the younger age ranges to play no part at all in any of my stories. For the purposes of this collection the school effectively has an age range of 14/15 - 18/19.

GCSEs and A-levels.

In 1986 the General Certificate of Secondary Education replaced both the O-level GCE and the CSE qualifications due to problems with the two-tieredness of the old system; O-levels were more academic and theoretical than the vocational-oriented CSE. In every case students normally sit these exams after five years of secondary education around the age of sixteen. There is a generally-held perception, however, that GCSEs are watered down versions of the old O-levels and some private schools have removed GCSEs from their curricula and instead encourage their students to proceed directly to A-level coursework.

According to official departmental propaganda, "The National Curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the changing needs of pupils and society." In the summer of 2006, this means that, "The following are compulsory [for pupils aged 14-16]: English, mathematics, science, information and communications technology, physical education, citizenship, religious

education, sex education, careers education and work-related learning. The arts, design and technology, the humanities and modern foreign languages are entitlement areas [for this age group]. This means schools must make available courses in each of these areas to all students who wish to study them. … Schools must provide religious education for all pupils, although parents can choose to withdraw their children."

The National Curriculum does not operate beyond the GCSE examinations at age 16. Many students opt to leave school after their GCSEs, but nowadays an increasing percentage stays on for A-level studies.

A-level is short for Advanced Level and are separate, further-education qualifications in specific subjects. They usually last for two years, but recently there have been moves in some schools for students to sit their GCSEs a year earlier and for their A-level studies to be extended into a third year. As all universities treat A-level exam results as essential university pre-requisites, although some universities and colleges require their own additional entrance examinations and/or interviews, schools which follow a three-year A-level program feel that this gives their students a competitive edge in the cutthroat world of university placement.

Students normally study three A-level subjects, although they may expand their schedules with one or two additional subjects which, whilst not nationally examined, may reflect favourably on their academic records. As stated in Grades or Marks, universities will demand specific marks for access to specific courses. A university may ask, say, for "two B's and a C" for one course, but "an A and two B's" for another, more popular course. Life can be tough for the student who wants to get into a particular course at a particular university or college.

For those who are interested, the Wikipedia*** articles, GCSE, A-level and related references, contain much additional information. Details about the National Curriculum comes from
http://www.dfes-uk.co.uk/teaching_resources/national_curriculum.html

Grades or Marks.

There is no all-or-nothing graduation from secondary school in England or Wales. Each subject is given a grade from A (the highest) to F, G and U (decreasing degrees of failure; U stands for Unclassified). Depending on the subject, these marks may come 100% from an examination (usually held simultaneously all over England and Wales near the end of year in May or June), or some or all of the marks may come from coursework throughout one, two or three years. In the case of coursework, marks are added as they are earned, not at the end of the term (semester). Universities will typically require a certain level of marks in a certain

number of subjects, for example two B's and one C. Higher grades are demanded to enter the more prestigious universities or for courses which are much in demand.

Before the Program, Laura Townley only needed to complete a few more weeks to have sufficient marks to go to her chosen university, but as marks will be awarded for completing the Program, on completion of the Program, she will have sufficient marks that she would not need to stay any longer. As the Program is not a "subject" in its own right, presumably the marks for the Program would be added to one or more of the subjects she is taking, simply increasing her grade for that/those subject(s).

Apples,

a noun, is short for "apples and pears" and means "stairs". See Rhyming Slang. (below)

Butcher's

is always a noun. It is short for "butcher's hook" and so a "butcher's" means a "look". More information on "butcher's" is in Rhyming Slang. (see below)

Flying,

when used as a verb, is short for "flying a kite" and means "to be right". More information on "flying" is in Rhyming Slang. (below)

Porky or Porkies,

a noun, is short for "pork pie" and means a "lie". See Rhyming Slang. (below)

Scarper,

a verb, is a strengthened version of "scapa", short for "Scapa Flow", and means "to go". Scapa Flow has been a large Royal Navy base in Scotland since before WWI. See Rhyming Slang. (below)

Snow,

a noun, is short for "snow flurries" and means "worries". Although it appears to be singular, snow often replaces the plural noun, worries, so grammatically snow would be plural too. See Rhyming Slang. (below)

Trouble,

a noun, is short for "trouble and strife" and means "wife". See Rhyming Slang. (below)

RHYMING SLANG.

Colloquialisms are always difficult for foreigners even if they think they understand the local language completely. There are many documented instances of German agents infiltrated into England during WWII who gave themselves away not through accent or pronunciation, both of which were spotless, but through their misuse of slang.

English slang had been strictly regionalised for centuries and difficult to comprehend except by other local people until the 1950s and the advent of national television. Now suddenly Cockney characters, in particular, whose natural habitat had been limited to the eastern end of London, started appearing in everyone's living room, and using their native patois, "rhyming slang". It works by substituting everyday words with other totally unrelated words or phrases. (See also Cockney below.)

The classic example is "me old china" which means "friend". "China" is short for "china plate" which rhymes with "mate", a very ordinary word for "friend" all over England. "Me old" is added to make a friendlier, more intimate, remark. Probably the most popular rhyming slang, however, is a "butcher's" which means a "look". This recalls pre-supermarket days when your neighbourhood butcher might hang a side of beef or a whole lamb carcass behind his counter. "Butcher's" is short for "butcher's hook" rhyming with "look". A pork pie is standard pub fare throughout England, and a "porky" or pork pie is a popular substitute for a "lie".

"Flyin'", when used as a verb, is short for "flying a kite" and means to be right, in the sense of correct. Its use is probably limited to the London area and the final "g" is nearly always dropped. Flyin' is also used as a simple intensifying adjective, typically in the phrase, "He doesn't give a flyin' fuck about that" to mean "He really, really doesn't care about that".

Some rhyming slang is rather humorous. "Trouble" is short for "trouble and strife" or "wife", a "richard the third" is a "turd", and my personal favourite, "brahms", is short for "brahms and liszt" or "pissed", a generally acceptable word for being drunk. There are several hundred rhyming slangs, and it can be fun to try to decode one you've not encountered before. A "rubber duck" should not tax you. Here "rubber duck" could be a noun or a verb.

Thanks to television the more familiar rhyming slangs can now be heard from Cornwall in the south of England to Cumbria in the north, from London pubs to the cloistered halls of Oxford colleges. As far as I know, however, Scotland and Wales have thus far resisted this particular linguistic invasion.

While we're on the subject of Cockney language, you might be interested to find out why one of the most fashionable and expensive areas of central London is called the "West End". This area includes much of the best of London's nightlife and has done since Victorian times. Cockneys liked equating their less salubrious home turf, the East End, with the toffs' stamping-ground, the West End. That this phrase is now part of standard English is another example of the sometimes subtle spread of "Cockney".

OTHER SLANG.

My American editor has succeeded in convincing me that some American slang will have corrupted the speech of some of the teenage characters. I insisted that an explanatory note be provided for the sake of non-American readers (and a certain English writer).

Similarly, I felt that some less familiar British slang was occasionally appropriate. Unless either list grows too long, a combined alphabetical list seems appropriate.

Bedsit (Br)

is accommodation where a person’s entire living space, bedroom and living room (or sitting room in traditional British parlance), is contained in one room. Bath and toilet facilities will be elsewhere in the building, but the bedsit may also include a refrigerator and/or a primitive cooking appliance. Bedsit is short for bedsitting-room, an old-fashioned term which is no longer used at all. Sometimes a bedsit is called a bedsitter, but that too is hardly used any more.

Beer goggles (Br and Am)

is a slang term for what happens when the consumption of alcohol lowers sexual inhibitions to the point at which very little or no discretion is used when approaching or choosing sexual partners. It is often humorously applied when an individual is observed making advances towards, and later regretting sexual contact with, a partner who would be deemed unattractive, unacceptably scandalous, or repulsive were the prospect of sex to be considered whilst sober. The "beer goggles" are considered to have distorted the "wearer's" vision, making unattractive people appear beautiful. Beer goggles are also known as "Stellavision" (after the popular lager, Stella Artois), "Beer glasses" and "The Cider Visor". And in August ’02 BBC News ran a story with the headline, "Beauty is in the eye of the beerholder".

Although Americans sometimes also use beer goggles, I believe they mostly prefer the term, beer glasses. Indeed, some American police departments have literal "beer glasses", which distort vision to an approximation of drunkenness. These are used in education programmes to teach people, particularly teenagers, about the dangers of drunken driving.

Whilst researching this note, I happened upon another BBC report. "…as part of our ongoing mission to reflect the diversity of the English language, here is a glossary of 141 euphemisms for just being drunk, suggested by the audience of BBC’s "One’s Booze" programme… Place names in brackets indicate a particular local usage. Potentially offensive words have been weeded out."

Other readers have since added a few more phrases, bringing the total here to 172, if I’ve done my sums properly. (Landlord, another pint, if you please.) By the way, Macavitee assures me that a few of following are likely to appear in his stories. Perhaps I’ll use one or two as well.

I must add a serious caveat. Obviously a lot of these words have other meanings, in both slang and correct language. For example, in England don’t call a girl minging if she’s drunk or her reaction might not be pleasant, as it also means disgustingly unattractive. My point is that slang is best used by those who really know it and best avoided by those who don’t.

ankled (Bristol), badgered, balearicsed, banjaxed, Barryed, battered, befuggered, Bernard Langered, bladdered, blasted, blathered, bleezin, blitzed, blootered, blottoed, bluttered, boogaloo, Brahms and Liszt, buckled, buttoned, burlin, cabbaged, Chevy Chased, clobbered, crapulent, decimated, dot cottoned, druck-steaming, drunk as a lord, drunk as a skunk, etched, fecked, fleein (Scotland), fleemered (Germany), floothered (west of Ireland), four to the floor, full of loud-mouth soup, ganted (Yorkshire), gatted, getting absolutely Moulin Rouged [after the film], goosed, got my beer goggles on, got my wobbly boots on (Australia), gubbed (Scotland), guttered (Inverness), had a couple of shickers, hammer-blowed,

hammered, hanging, having a close look at the footpath (Australia), having the whirlygigs, howling, inebriated, intoxicated, jahalered, jaiked up (west of Scotland), Jan'd - abbrev for Jan Hammer-ed, jaxied, Jeremied, jober as a sudge, jolly, kaned, lagged up, lamped, langered (Ireland) [also langers, langerated], laroped, [or larrupt], lashed, leathered, legless, liquored up (South Carolina), locked, locked out of your mind (Ireland), loo la, Lutoned [after the airport/town north of London], mad wey it, mandoo-ed, mangled, manky, mashed, meff'd, Merl Haggard, kippered [smoked herring or small salmon], merry, Michael Fished [after the BBC weatherman who infamously failed to forecast Britain's worst hurricane in '87], minced, ming-ho, minging, ming mong (Scotland), moired, monged, monkey-full, mottled, muckibus, mullered, muntit, newcastled [for the popular Newcastle Brown Ale], nicely irrigated with horizontal lubricant, oblonctorated, off me pickle, off me trolley, off my Woo, on a campaign, out of it, out yer tree, paggered, palintoshed, paraletic, peelywally, peevied, phalanxed, pickled, pie-eyed, pished, plastered, poleaxed, pollatic, predicting earthquakes (Australia), rat-legged (Stockport), ratted, ravaged, razzled, reek-ho, rendered, rosy glow, rubbered, ruined, saying hello to Mr. Armitage, scattered, schindlers, schnockered (US), schnooked (US), screwed, scuttered (Dublin), shedded [as in "My shed has collapsed taking most of the fence with it."], shickers [old Yiddish word], slaughtered, sloshed, smashed, snatered (Ireland), snobbled (Wales), sozzled, spangled, spannered, spiffed, spongelled, squiffy, steamin, steampigged, stocious, stonkin, tanked, tashered, Thora Hirded [retired English actress], tipsy, tired and emotional [first used to describe Labour politician, George Brown in the 1950s and '60s], troattered, trashed, trollied, troubled, trousered, twisted, warped, wasted, wellied, Williamed (Belfast), with the fairies, wrecked and zombied.

Beeswax (Am and Br)

There are two informal meanings for beeswax, which are completely unrelated to one another. The earlier one, now used more by children than adults, appears in the phrases, "Mind your own beeswax" or "None of your beeswax". It is an Americanism dating from the 1930s and is simply an intentional malapropism for "business".

A more recent coinage is the use of beeswax as Rhyming Slang. (see above) for "income tax". This British usage dates from the 1980s. It is also a play on the much older Rhyming Slang, bees, which is short for "bees and honey" and means "money".

Boot (Br)

is the storage space in an automobile that Americans call the trunk.

Bottle (Br)

As well as the obvious meanings to do with containers for liquids, "to have bottle" means to have courage and a task which "requires bottle" is one that is daring and needs courage. However, to "bottle it" or to "bottle out" or to "lose one's bottle" means to lack or lose courage and decide not to do something or to run away from something or someone. And to "bottle something up" is to hold back or suppress one's feelings about something.

Brass monkey(s) (Br)

is an informal reference to extremely cold weather, or the cold one feels in such weather. It alludes to the expression, "cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey". That is not as rude a phrase as you might think. Back when naval warships fired cannon balls instead of explosive shells, the cannon balls were racked for quick access on movable "monkeys", which were usually made of brass.

Buff (Am)

, as used here, means having attractively well-developed muscles particularly in the chest, back and upper arms and nearly always refers to a male. Although the term comes from the world of body-building, attractiveness is crucial. Think of a swimmer's physique, not a weightlifter's.

Bugger off.

To leave quickly, often ignoring anyone else present at the time.

Bugger.

The first two paragraphs in the section on Piss apply with equal vigour to bugger and its related phrases. Although slang, everything here has long ago lost any obscene flavour. However, bugger still maintains its original meaning as a verb, to perform anal intercourse, or as a noun, someone who so performs. Despite this, bugger and its derivatives remain inoffensive in everyday speech.

Again I am indebted to the 2003 edition of the "Chambers Dictionary" for what follows here.

Bugger: As a noun bugger is a term of abuse for a man or a child, but the implication of its use really depends on context. Often it is quite colourless or even kindly, rather like an American from the Deep South might refer to a friend as a son of a bitch. A bugger could also be a rogue or scamp and be applied inoffensively to a child or an animal. And sometimes a difficult or unpleasant task is called a bugger.

However, bugger is also used in many other ways: bugger (interjection): used to express any degree of annoyance. bugger (verb): to exhaust; to frustrate or ruin the plans of. bugger about or around: to potter about or do nothing useful; to mess someone about. bugger all: nothing or none of something. bugger off: to leave quickly, often ignoring anyone else present at the time. bugger up: to spoil or prevent success in. don't or couldn't give a bugger: couldn't care less. like buggery (adverb): furiously or frenziedly. like buggery (interjection): used to express strong disagreement. play silly buggers: to behave foolishly.

Bung (Br)

is mostly used as a verb, meaning to throw or shove something into something else carelessly and hurriedly. It comes from the noun, bung, which is the stopper of a hole in a barrel or vat, or any large cork.

Chuffed (Br)

Since World War II this means very pleased with one's general lot in life, or if something delightful happens. Apparently, however, before the war it meant the exact opposite. Its derivation is obscure, to say the least. For those interested in such matters, almost all you could wish to know about "chuffed" may be found in the article at http://www.verbatimmag.com/Howard-1.html (This link opens in a new window)

Chutzpah (Am)

is a Yiddish word meaning brazenness or impudence. It is complimentary throughout the entertainment industry and not an insult, in Britain as well as America. However, it is also used much more widely in the States with the same meaning. The leading "C" is silent.

Clobber (Br and Am)

as a noun in the US is an informal term for personal property in general. In Britain it is usually more specific and refers to clothing or equipment. The origin of its meaning as clothing is obscure, but may be related to the clobber that is the paste used by shoemakers to hide the cracks in leather, treating clothing as little more than cover.

Cozzie (Br)

is a noun meaning any swimming costume, one-piece or two-piece, demure or daring, female or male. Our Australian brethren also use cozzie as a verb, e.g. "Let's cozzie up and head for the beach."

Creep (Br)

may be a noun or a verb. It has several meanings, but two of them in particular appear in the stories. When Gerard Vaughan calls himself a creep, he is admitting that he is a person who often does nice things for others from purely selfish motives. This is not as reprehensible as it sounds when both the creep and the recipient of a favour freely acknowledge the reality of the situation. Then everyone wins. It's when the creep is dishonest about motive, or the favours turn into outright bribes, that creeping becomes unsavoury.

However, Lucy Morris uses creep to mean someone who appears to behave in an obsequious (submissively obedient; fawning) way and fails to show the independent spirit others expect. Of course, she's not like that at all (in her relationship with Dr. Reynolds), even if some students think she is.

Digs (Br)

is always a plural noun when it refers to one's temporary or permanent accommodation or lodgings. It tends to be used mostly by people under thirty and living alone, and by boys much more than girls; a girl is more likely to refer to her room, her bedsit (see above) or her flat. However, if a mixed group of young people are sharing a single house, all of them may call that house their digs.

Students in particular might be embarrassed (but I doubt it) to know that the word, digs was originally an insulting comparison with an archaeological site, or dig, suggesting that it would take a trained archaeologist to find anything in that person's room.

Gagging for (something) (Br)

means to really, really want or need something, as eagerly as one would need air if one were having great difficulty breathing. Its normal usage refers to great thirst, or great hunger, but it can also refer, impolitely, to a woman eager for sexual gratification; the phrase then would be, "She's gagging for it."

Gen (Br)

is an informal term for general information. It suggests that the information is confidential or at least restricted, as in inside information, or that it may be of a damaging nature if revealed.

Heaving (Br)

A word heard frequently in Northern England, it describes a place which is full of people, usually referring to a busy pub or nightclub which is so "packed" with people that it is difficult to move, though it can also refer to any place which is very crowded, even open streets.

In the chair (Br)

- See Shout

In the club (Br)

is a shortened form of "in the pudding club" and means to be pregnant. In Britain working mothers will often leave their preschool offspring with childminders, registered or not. Non-working mums often get together to relax, gossip and swap recipes. These informal groups are known as pudding clubs. In 1985 an official "Pudding Club" was formed in England to promote the baking and eating of traditional British puddings, or desserts, which it reckons is in danger of becoming a lost art. Since then it has grown into a worldwide, albeit informal, organisation.

Jobsworth (Br)

at one time only referred to a minor official who regarded the rigid enforcement of petty rules as more important than providing a service to the public. The word came from such a person's whining mantra, "It's more than my job's worth to let you …". For many years the word was hardly known outside of the public services.

However, a very popular consumer affairs television programme, That's Life! which ran on the BBC from 1973 to 1994, had a regular feature for many years called Jobsworth. In it they exposed both companies and public authorities that had implemented obscure regulations and policies which caused more grievances than the original problem they were meant to solve. Thus, because of this programme, a jobsworth may now work in a private company as well as in a public bureaucracy.

Kini (Br)

is the lower half only of a bikini. The word is mostly used in the fashion world as part of a descriptive name. For example, the V-kini bikini bottom takes its name from its shape: viewed from the front or the back it looks like the letter V superimposed on the pelvis or bottom. It is also called a v, v-brief, or papillon (French for butterfly). Seen from the front its waistline is high on the sides of the waist with a "V" notch centred below the navel with a depth that matches the bravery of its wearer.

Kip. (Br)

Throughout Britain and Ireland, kip is a synonym for a nap or a short sleep, as both a noun and a verb. By extension a kip is also a bed or a (typically small) flat or apartment. However, in the working-class speech of the Midlands, Northern England and Scotland a kip may be any sleep, even an overnight one. And in Ireland a kip is also a brothel.

Knackered (Br)

as an adjective means exhausted or worn out. To knacker (someone) is to tire them out. Traditionally a knacker bought and slaughtered old horses, but more recently s/he buys and breaks up old houses, ships etc., salvaging whatever can be recovered and selling the remainder for scrap. A knacker's yard is also a metaphor for "the scrapheap".

Knock up (Br)

has several meanings, none of which relate to causing pregnancy. Its basic meaning is literal, to rouse someone from sleep by knocking on their door. If you knock something up, you've constructed it quickly, perhaps from scrap, but certainly in an unplanned, haphazard fashion. In complete contrast to that a cricket batsman may knock up a large number of runs through careful and skilful play over hours or even more than a full day's play. In tennis, on the other hand, a player will knock up with their opponent on court immediately prior to the match.

Lech (Br)

is an insulting verb meaning to behave in a lustful manner. It usually refers to speech or leers and less often to more direct action. It comes from the noun, lecher.

Lousy (Br and Am)

rarely has anything to do with lice in British English. Something lousy is inferior, bad or unsatisfactory, and someone who feels lousy is feeling under the weather or out of sorts, even depressed, or some ill-defined combination of all three.

The original meaning of lice infestation is echoed, however, in the phrase "lousy with something". A very busy road, for example, could be said to be "lousy with cars and vans".

Muggins (Br),

a noun without a preceding article, means a fool or an idiot, and most of the time is used facetiously to refer to oneself.

Nick (Br)

is a remarkably flexible bit of British slang. As an informal verb it may mean to steal something, anything from a biscuit on another’s plate to several millions from a treasury repository. Or it may mean to arrest someone for a crime, or simply to catch someone you’re chasing. In cricket, a batsman nicks the ball when the edge of his bat causes a slight deflection to the ball’s flight.

As a noun, a nick may be a prison or a police station. Everywhere, "in the nick of time" means just in time or at the critical moment, but the British also have "in good nick" to mean in good health or very fit in the case of a person, or in good

condition in the case of an object, especially something like a car being offered for sale.

Offie (Br)

is used familiarly to refer to an Off-licence. (see under Off-licence)

On the trot (Br)

describes an unbroken series of actions or occurrences. There is often a sense of being busy or bustling about, like a horse trotting, which is a quicker gait than walking, but slower than a canter or a gallop.

OTT (Br)

is always pronounced, "oh tee tee". It is short for over-the-top, meaning excessive, immoderate or extravagant. "To go over the top" dates from World War I and referred to venturing over the parapet of one's own trench into the decidedly dangerous "no-man's-land" between one's own line and that of the enemy.

Piss.

If you care to lower your eyebrows for a moment, perhaps you'll allow me to introduce you to one of the more arcane areas of British (and Irish) English. Quite why the list below should be so extensive is a question for linguists, sociologists, psychologists or even urologists, not for me. But I do know what I hear around me every day in the nonchalant speech of Cambridge dons, TV presenters, maiden aunts, vicars and naked schoolgirls.

The list comes from the 2003 edition of the "Chambers Dictionary" (For those unfamiliar with this respected work, it has been in continuous publication since 1901.) All of these phrases are in (fairly) common usage throughout Britain and Ireland. I've tried to include all of the common definitions. An item with multiple common meanings has all of those meanings shown.

piss artist: a heavy drinker; one who is all talk; a foolish show-off. pissed: extremely drunk; annoyed. pisshead: a heavy drinker; a habitual drunkard. piss-poor: of a contemptibly low standard. piss-take: an instance of mockery. piss-up: a drinking bout; a raucous party. a piece of piss: an easy thing to do, a piece of cake.

on the piss: engaged in heavy drinking. piss about or around: to behave in a foolish or time-wasting way; piss (someone) about: to inconvenience (someone). piss down: to rain heavily. take the piss (out of): to mock; to tease. a pot to piss in: a meagre possession.

"Pissed"

is probably worth highlighting as it's also American slang. If an American is either pissed or pissed off, I believe s/he is angry or at least annoyed. If a Brit is pissed, s/he is drunk. If s/he is pissed off, s/he is usually angry but may be only annoyed. However, just to confuse the issue completely, in southern England while a "pissed off" Brit is always angry, a "pissed" Brit may be either drunk or angry, or possibly both, although this may well be a result of American influence.

Pissed as a newt

means to be extremely drunk. Why this member of the salamander family should be cited as an example of inebriation is obscure. The derivation of "newt" is also unusual. It comes from the Old English word, "eft", meaning lizard. Along the way, "an eft" became "a neft", a process known to linguists as Junctural Metanalysis, before evolving in a similar way to many old words from neft to newt.

Piss off

as an interjection is a demand that someone leave immediately without (further) discussion. Similarly, one may piss off by leaving immediately, dramatically even, without any concern for others or without finishing the task at hand. In addition, to piss someone off means to annoy or anger someone. Depending on context the emotion caused may vary from friendly annoyance to seriously hostile anger.

By the way, the reference above to naked schoolgirls is a reasonable example of taking the piss.

Prig (Br)

as a noun is a sanctimonious person, certain of their blamelessness and critical of others' failings, or a person of precise, often self-defined, morals but lacking a sense of proportion or tolerance. Still in common usage in Britain, I believe it is much rarer in the States and considered an old-fashioned word there.

Pull (Br)

as a verb is used colloquially to mean to succeed in forming a sexual relationship, often, but not always, on a casual basis. The relationship could be straight or gay. It is always a complimentary term. Moreover, if one is "on the pull", one is frequenting places such as nightclubs, pubs, etc. with the intention of finding a sexual partner.

Punter (Br)

is usually a customer or a client of either a prostitute or a gambling establishment. It is also a derogatory term for any ordinary person in a situation where they may be at a disadvantage, for example, a naive customer of a smooth-talking unscrupulous salesman. It has the same meaning in America, but its use there is much rarer, probably to avoid confusion with an American football drop-kicker.

Rubbish (Br)

has its normal meaning of waste matter, litter or trash, but in Britain it also means nonsense, as in the phrase, "talking a load of rubbish". Sometimes, however, it is a totally neutral word and is used as a substitute noun when the speaker does not know what word s/he should be using instead.

Rumble (Br)

as slang means to discover the truth about someone else or to see through another's attempts to mislead. In practice it is mostly used in the passive voice, e.g. "I've been rumbled", when one realises that one's prevarications have been exposed. Amongst British criminals, to be rumbled also means specifically to have been betrayed to the police.

Scupper (Br)

started as a nautical term meaning to sink a vessel at sea by flooding it with seawater, perhaps ironically by blocking the vessel's scuppers which are openings at the side of a ship's deck that allow water from a storm or a heavy wave to drain away safely. In the construction industry, scuppers are also integral storm drains in a building. Similarly, in ordinary speech, a person's plans are scuppered when they are ruined, either by accidental circumstance or the intentional sabotage of another.

Section. (Br)

This is a reference to the various British Mental Health Acts which give power to certain individuals, mainly doctors, to detain someone for varying lengths of time for their own safety or for the safety of others. When someone is under "Section ##", it means that they are detained, usually in a mental hospital and often in a secure ward, under that particular section of the Act. By extension, to "section" someone is to detain them under the current Mental Health Act.

Shout and In the chair - Shout (Br)

as a noun has its ordinary meaning of loud speech in Britain, but informally it also refers to a turn to buy a round of drinks in a pub or bar. It simply comes from shouting to the landlord or bartender in order to be served. Similarly to be **in the chair** in a pub is to be the person buying the next round, or even to be buying every round at the time.

A "shout" is also used by the emergency services (firefighters, police and ambulance) to refer to a specific call-out. I suppose this is a simple extension of the idea of responding to someone's shout of "Help!"

Shtoom (Br),

also spelt schtoom, shtum or shtumm, is only used in the phrases, "keep shtoom" or "stay shtoom". They are used interchangeably to mean to keep quiet, either in the sense of not speaking or in the sense of not revealing a confidence. It is a Yiddish word that comes directly from the German, stumm, meaning silent. Shtoom is a Cockney term which has spread throughout Britain since the 1950s. It is pronounced with the short oo-sound of book, rather than the long oo-sound of room.

Skint (Br)

is an adjective meaning to be without money. Sometimes it's used to mean destitute, but more often simply implies that one is without immediate funds. It comes from "skinned" in the sense of having one's outer protective layer removed.

Slag off (Br)

as slang means to insult someone in a mocking, derisive manner. Originally slag was the solid scum that forms on molten metal as it cools, or coalmining waste, and it's still used for either purpose. But for a long time it also has been a vulgar term for a slovenly or immoral woman. More recently it can also refer to such a man. Thus to slag off someone is to compare them to one or more of the various meanings of slag.

Suss (Br)

is an informal shortening of suspect, the verb, or suspicion. It may be spelt "sus" in any of its meanings.

Its usual meaning, often with a following "out", is to investigate something or someone, or to discover something previously unknown. Less often it’s a noun, meaning knowledge or awareness.

As a noun suss also means both suspicious behaviour, for instance loitering with intent, and the suspicion by others that such behaviour has occurred. Laws allowing a person to be arrested on suspicion of having committed a crime are known as "sus (or suss) laws" and to suss someone may mean to arrest them simply for suspicious behaviour.

Taking the piss. (Br)

Take the piss (out of): to mock; to tease. Piss-take: an instance of mockery.

Tannoy (Br)

is used generically for any public-address system, whether covering a single room, several rooms, a whole building or group of buildings, or even an entire sports stadium. It is, however, the registered trademark for a specific system, so it should be capitalised. The word originates from "tantalum alloy", the material required for some key electronic components. It may also be used as a verb, uncapitalised, meaning to broadcast on a Tannoy-like system.

Trackie (Br)

is an informal name for a tracksuit. This gives me the chance to quote the "Chambers Dictionary" again. It defines a tracksuit as "a loose warm suit intended to be worn by athletes when warming up or training, but sometimes worn by others in an error of judgement".

Wind up. (Br)

When this rhymes with "signed up", it is another of those phrases that has maintained its normal literal meaning, whilst acquiring additional (in)formal meanings. It may mean to end up in a certain state after a period of evolutionary development, or to bring or come to a conclusion. In business a commercial enterprise is wound up when it becomes insolvent and some sort of bankruptcy proceedings are instituted. In mechanics a rope or a spring-like device is wound up if it is coiled or tightened completely. Automobile windows in Britain are wound up or down when they are opened or closed, whether the mechanism is electric or manual. Or something heavy may be wound up when a winch hoists it.

Winding an individual up usually means more in Britain than simply teasing someone or "pulling their leg", although in context simple teasing may be the sense. Instead, winding someone up suggests that they have been irritated, annoyed or even angered. And finally, there is an old-fashioned phrase that deserves to return to common usage: to wind something up and down once meant to mull over it at length in one’s thoughts.

When wind up rhymes with "pinned up", it normally appears in the phrase, to get (or have) the wind up, and means to become (or be) nervous, apprehensive, agitated or angered. Thus one may get their wind up when they have been wound up by another.

CULTURAL POINTS.

This section is for items of background interest which don't actually need defining.

Fiver, Tenner and Quid.

Three old-fashioned "money" words remain in everyday speech. A fiver is a £5 note, a tenner is a £10 note and a quid means one pound. One anomaly, however, is that most of the time the plural of "quid" is also "quid". Thus that T-shirt costs "five quid" or "a fiver" and those new trainers cost "forty quid". The new home a couple purchased cost them over "a hundred thousand quid" whilst a government agency wasted "seventeen million quid" last year. This last item would appear as either "£17 million" or "17 million quid" in the newspapers. About the only time "quids" is used is in the slang expression, **quids in** which means in a very favourable or profitable situation.

Money.

On 14 February 1971 Britain had its own St. Valentine's Day Massacre. That was the last day that 1 pound contained 20 shillings and 1 shilling contained 12 pence. The next day 1 pound contained 100 new pence, or 100p. It would be about a decade before that "new" disappeared from common usage. It had taken the British Treasury over five years to prepare for the changeover. One tangible thing the Treasury did before "Decimalisation Day" was to introduce a new 7-sided coin worth 50 "new pence" in 1969 and to withdraw the similarly valued 10-shilling note from circulation a little later.

For those of you who are interested, here's what has happened to British coinage since our D-Day. The old large penny, the old halfpenny and the old threepenny bit became obsolete immediately. In June '80 our beloved sixpence, now worth 2.5p, was finally withdrawn, severing our last cultural link with the old money. In June '82 the new 7-sided 20p coin was introduced. In April '83 a smallish, round and fairly heavy £1 coin appeared, but it took over a decade for the £1 paper note to disappear completely. And finally in June '98 a large £2 coin came into circulation. And that's where we are in February '06.

Except for the withdrawal of the £1 note in 1988, and some modern redesign, the paper money has remained fairly constant. All notes more valuable than £10 had been withdrawn at the end of World War II. The £20 note was reintroduced in the early 70s, but this had nothing to do with decimalisation. The £50 note, that mainstay of the (slightly) dodgy cash economy, reappeared in 1981.

The information here has been gleaned from several Wikipedia*** articles as well as from the archives of the BBC and the (London) Times.

Cuppa.

Short for "Cup of tea" and it will always be tea. In Britain nowadays nearly as much coffee as tea is drunk, but a "cuppa" is always tea. And a cuppa always refers to the drink and not its delivery system. The finest bone china in the Queen's boudoir and a huge chipped mug with a broken handle in a coalmine's showers, both are cuppas.

Tea.

Ever since the Victorian days of empire, India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka to those who may have forgotten) tea has had such a place in British culture that it is worth some comment. Many times the British treat tea as if it were the answer to everything, part of the old British "stiff upper lip". In the comedy film "Carry On Up the Khyber", while the building was under siege, being attacked, with plaster falling off the ceiling with each new explosion, one of the characters was dutifully serving tea to the others as if nothing were awry.

While that was obviously comedic exaggeration, and this attitude about tea remains a cliché, it is firmly rooted in reality. A visitor comes to your house - offer tea. Anything goes wrong - offer tea to comfort them. When I worked in a hospital Casualty unit (Emergency Room), we often said that if we ever brought a relative to a hospital and were offered tea, we'd know there was bad news to come! (This isn't always the case nowadays as there are often volunteer "tea ladies" serving refreshments to people in Casualty, so if this does happen to you, don't immediately panic!)

After the London Bombings on 7th July 2005, "The Times" newspaper said, "Britain is at its best when it demonstrates, in its daily routine and lives, the values of humour, moderation, reasonableness and imperturbability." These characteristics were showcased in the Internet-circulated list of quotes gathered from Londoners in the wake of the bombings.

> When the news reporter said "Shopkeepers are opening their doors bringing out blankets and cups of tea" I just smiled. It's like yes. That's Britain for you. Tea solves everything.

You're a bit cold?

Tea.

Your boyfriend has just left you?

Tea.

(And here our Shelley could include, "Been abducted?

Tea.")

You've just been told you've got cancer?

Tea.

Coordinated terrorist attack on the transport network bringing the city to a grinding halt? TEA DAMMIT!

My kettle broke. We had to go and buy a new one. You can't have a national emergency without tea and the one time I tried to boil water in a saucepan, I spilt it all over the floor.

Tea, is also a meal or light refreshment where tea is generally served. It normally occurs any time between 3pm and 7pm, although in working-class households, a breadwinner can have a meal of any size called tea at whatever time s/he returns home from work. Sometimes a fairly substantial meal is called high tea.

"Tea" may even be a formal afternoon party, often outside, where hot drinks, cut sandwiches and cakes are served. "Tea with the Queen" is such an affair.

And finally, "tea and sympathy" is general hospitality and kind words offered to someone in trouble, as being the only, often inadequate, help that one can give.

British newspapers.

Despite the 21st-century emphasis on electronic media, Britain still maintains a thriving and varied newspaper industry. Although the national press remains almost exclusively based in London, the Guardian and a small number of Scottish papers being the only exceptions, almost every town of any size supports a successful local paper as well.

Each national newspaper has its own flavour and serves its own market sector. An old joke describes the breadth of the industry better than I ever could. "The Times is read by those who run the country. The Financial Times is read by those who own the country. The Mail is read by the wives of those who run, or own, the country. The Independent is read by those who think the people running the country are liars. The Guardian and the Observer are read by those who think they should be running the country. The Telegraph is read by those who think the country should be run the way it used to be run. The Express is read by those who think it still is.

"The Mirror is read by those who think the trade unions should run the country. The Morning Star, once affiliated with the Communist Party, is read by those who think the country should be run by another country. The European, now defunct, was read by those who think the country should be run by several other countries. The Herald and the Scotsman are read by those who think Scotland should run the country. The People and the News Of The World are read by those who don't care who runs the country unless they're sleeping around. The Racing Post is read by those who care more about horses than who runs the country. And finally, the Star and the Sun are read by those who don't care who runs the country as long as she's got big tits."

Actually, that last line is most unfair to the Star and the Sun. Both are serious tabloid newspapers, not a contradiction in Britain, each with a consistent and open editorial stance. The fact that they daily feature a topless model, on page seven of the Star and page three of the Sun, affects their circulation, not the remainder of their content.

Fleet Street.

Until the 1980s the national newspapers all had their editorial offices in Fleet Street. Although central London expenses have since forced most of them to move elsewhere in the capital area, "Fleet Street" remains a verbal shorthand for the industry as a whole.

The Sport.

This publication appears daily. It looks like a newspaper, it feels like a newspaper, but the resemblance ends there. In fact it's a soft-core porno mag that invests about a quarter of its pages in admittedly thorough sports coverage. But a newspaper? I don't think so.

Oliver Cromwell.

The English Civil War was a series of conflicts between Parliamentarians and Royalists between 1642 and 1651, which led to a temporary republic after King Charles I of England was beheaded on a charge of treason. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was an English military leader and politician, and one of only two commoners ever to have been the English Head of State, the other being his son, Richard Cromwell. He believed in parliamentary rule, but political circumstances and his reliance on the army transformed him into Britain's only military dictator, with the title of Lord Protector, a king in all but name.

Cromwell was a committed Puritan. One of the main reasons for his opposition to Charles I before the Civil Wars was the persecution of radical Protestant groups. He was also a firm believer in "Providentialism" - the belief that God was actively directing the affairs of the world, through the actions of "chosen people", whom God had "provided" for such purposes. He believed, during the Civil Wars, that he was one of these people, and he interpreted victories as indications of God's approval of his actions, and defeats as signs that God was directing him in another direction.

Like some modern "democratic" leaders, his religious beliefs allowed him to suppress democracy and ruthlessly crush opposition, notoriously in Ireland, where he is still blamed for massacres, although to be fair, the Irish had chosen to actively support the King in the Civil War, so his invasion was not unprovoked.

Unlike a king, his position was not hereditary, but he was given the right to choose his successor and he chose his son, Richard. Richard Cromwell was educated at Magdalene College, Cambridge, thus distinguishing him as the only English head of state to have graduated from a university. He "reigned" for just eight months before resigning or "abdicating" after a demand by Parliament. This was the beginning of a short period of restoration of the Commonwealth of England but led to a state of anarchy that resulted in the return of the exiled King Charles II of England and the English Restoration.

The information here has been gleaned from several Wikipedia*** articles. For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Cromwell and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Cromwell

---

MISCELLANEOUS EXPLANATIONS

A Verbal Smörgåsbord.

Every once in a while we've used a word or phrase that just seemed ideal in context, but which has turned out to be completely unfamiliar to one or more readers. This has nothing to do with my Britishness, nor is it related to slang, British or otherwise. Working on the theory that a single query will often reflect confusion for other readers as well, here is a collection of (more or less) straightforward definitions. I hope some of you will find them useful.

Biro.

The ballpoint pen is known throughout Europe and elsewhere as a Biro, named for its Hungarian inventor, László Bíró. It is a registered trademark and should be capitalised, but most people fail to do so nowadays.

Bíró first patented his invention in Paris in 1938, after fleeing anti-Jewish laws in Hungary. He filed a new patent in 1943 in Argentina and formed a company to market it worldwide. An American businessman saw the pen in Buenos Aires, stole the design and beat Bíró's company to market in the States. Thus the word, Biro never caught on there.

Two bits of trivia: "bíró" means "judge" in Hungarian and the Al Faisalia skyscraper in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia has been built in the shape of a Biro.

Bloomer.

Nothing to do with flowers, here a bloomer is a longish crusty loaf of white bread with rounded ends and a number of slashes across the top. It's usually a plain loaf, but sometimes it's sprinkled with sesame or caraway seeds during baking.

Bukkake

is a group-sex practice wherein a series of men take turns ejaculating onto someone. There can be strong overtones of erotic humiliation here. Various styles exist, but a common form of bukkake involves a woman sitting, lying down, or kneeling while men approach to masturbate until they ejaculate on her body, primarily on the face or in the mouth. The semen is left on the face as another man repeats the routine. Talk show host, Howard Stern popularised the term in the US on his nationally syndicated radio programme. Controversy arose regarding the meaning of the word when station managers began censoring its use, inadvertently

creating even more interest and no doubt amusing Mr. Stern.

Adult video companies popularised bukkake in Japan in the first half of the 1990s. A significant factor in its development there was probably the mandatory censorship of genitalia in Japanese pornography. Since the directors could not show penetration they had to invent new, visually-appealing ways to approach sex acts that would satisfy the audience without violating Japanese law. Semen was not required to be censored, thus creating a loophole for harder sex scenes.

Bukkake is the noun form of the Japanese verb "bukkakeru", meaning to splash. The word, bukkake is often used in Japanese to describe pouring out water (or other liquids) with sufficient momentum to cause splashing or spilling. Indeed, in Japan and Tanzania (!) bukkake also describes any type of dish where the toppings are poured on top of noodles.

"Burn the candle at both ends"

means to exhaust oneself by attempting to do too much, usually by going to bed late and getting up early for work. The phrase comes from the Edna St. Vincent Millay poem, "First Fig" in her collection, "A Few Figs From Thistles" published in 1921: "My candle burns at both ends; / It will not last the night; / But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends-- / It gives a lovely light!"

Callipygous

is a fine old word, approved of by nineteenth-century British novelists. It exactly means "having beautiful buttocks" and comes from two Greek words, "kallos" beauty and "pygê" buttocks. The word deserves to be as popular again as its subject matter has always been, especially as all the modern alternatives are, shall we say, impolite.

Cockneys

are, in the present-day sense of the word, white working-class inhabitants of London. According to tradition, the strict definition is limited to those born within earshot (generally taken to be three miles) of the Bow Bells, in other words the bells of St. Mary-le-Bow Church inside the square-mile business area of London know as "The City". However, the bells were silent from the outbreak of World War II until 1961. Also, of course, as the general din in London has increased, the area in which the bells can be heard has contracted. Formerly it included the City, Bethnal Green, Stepney, Shoreditch, Whitechapel (where Jack the Ripper plied his gruesome trade in 1888), Finsbury and Hackney although according to the legend of Dick Whittington the bells could be heard from as far away as Highgate in North London over four miles away from the Bow Bells. (This note has been adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockney, where more information about Cockneys and their language may be found.)

Cubby-hole.

One meaning of cub is rural, a cattle-pen. From this came "cubby", and eventually cubby-hole, for any small and snug enclosed space. Nowadays it usually refers to a small open compartment in a desk or one of (usually) several such compartments mounted on a wall or resting on a table. Metaphorically, a very small office for one (overworked?) person may be called a cubby-hole as well.

Dived

is the correct past tense of dive in Britain, rather than the American form, dove.

E number.

The European Union continues to impinge upon every facet of British life. E numbers are identification codes required by EU law for food additives such as colourings and preservatives, consisting of the letter E followed by a number. Whatever one's politics, this is one area where complaints are inappropriate. My editor has an unfortunate friend with a long list of allergenic substances to be avoided, many of which now carry E numbers, something vitally useful to this person whilst shopping.

Floor,

specifically the numbering of floors in a building. In most of Europe, and thus in British and Commonwealth usage, the floor at the ground level is the "ground floor" and the floor above is the "first floor", which maintains the continental European use dating from medieval times. For example, in French, the term for the ground floor is rez de chaussée, literally the road level. But in North American usage (except in Quebec), the floor at the ground level is usually, but not always, the "first floor" and the floor above is the "second floor". This latter system is also used in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. China follows the American system, except that the numbers used are cardinals (one, two, three, etc.) rather than ordinals (first, second, third).

The height of a British building, as expressed in storeys, always includes the ground floor. Thus the top floor of a four-storey building in Britain is the third floor, as opposed to the fourth floor in the States.

In some countries, the number thirteen is considered unlucky and building owners will sometimes purposely "omit" the thirteenth floor. Note that this consideration always applies to the number, and not the actual floor. Thus in Britain it would be from the fourteenth actual floor onwards that the renumbering would occur.

Football

refers to the sport defined by the Football Association in England in 1863, codifying rules for a game dating back to medieval times and beyond. Thus its official standing predates by several decades the American sport of the same name. It was called "association football" until the 1880s when "soccer" became a slang abbreviation for the association game, to distinguish it from "Rugby football". When the latter became known simply as "rugby", then soccer became simply "football". The word, soccer does remain in common British speech today, though used much less often than football.

American "football" developed from British rugby, so Americans chose to use the term, soccer for what the rest of the world insists is football. And I do mean the rest of the world. The International Olympic Committee uses "football" as does the game's world governing body, FIFA. Americans should note that FIFA has a greater number of member countries than the United Nations.

Fortnight.

The article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortnight defines it as "a unit of time equal to two weeks: that is 14 days or literally 14 nights. The term is common in British English, Hiberno-English and Australian English, but rarely used in American English. It derives from the Old English feowertiene niht, meaning 'fourteen nights'." The article cited here is also worth a visit for an entertaining piece on the "absurd usage" of fortnight. See also Wikipedia*** below.

Gobsmacked.

"Gobble", to swallow quickly or in lumps, and "gob", slang for mouth, come from the same Old French root. So gobsmacked means literally slapped in the mouth and by extension astounded when something unexpected occurs.

Guffaw.

As a noun or a verb, a guffaw is a loud boisterous laugh, often accompanied by body movement and is what some people refer to as a "horse laugh".

High Street.

Every city and town in Britain, and most villages of any size, have their own "high street". It is the common name for the main, or former main, shopping area. It may or may not be named "high street". In Brighton, for instance, the high street is Western Road, whilst in nearby Lewes it is "The High Street". Typically it will include small, family-run shops as well as branches of one or more major department stores. Nowadays it has often been pedestrianised, only buses and taxis perhaps having direct access, with multistorey car-parking facilities close by. "The high street" also refers to shops generally and the everyday marketplace.

High Road.

A "high road", on the other hand, is always outside of town, and will be one of the chief roads for general traffic through an area. If one takes "the high road" metaphorically, one is attempting to achieve something quickly and efficiently.

Jumper, Jersey, Sweater, Pullover and Cardigan,

are all items of clothing for the upper body. The words are mostly interchangeable in common British usage, except for pullover and cardigan.

A jumper in Britain is not the pinafore dress which Americans will immediately think of. It is usually a knitted garment and the closest American equivalent is probably a sweater. It may be long-sleeved, short-sleeved or occasionally sleeveless. In the nineteenth century and earlier, a jump was a short coat, just long enough to cover a person’s bum and a jumper was then a loose-fitting waist-length lightweight garment slipped over the head.

Jersey is the finest part of wool, so a jersey should be a woollen jumper, though this distinction has mostly disappeared. The name comes from the island of Jersey in the Channel Islands where the fabric was originally woven. The top half of the uniform worn by soccer or rugby players is called either a jersey or a shirt regardless of the material from which it’s made.

Traditionally a sweater was, quite literally, a heavy garment meant to cause sweating during exercise, but that sense of the word has now been lost and a sweater has become any leisurewear jumper. Either of them, but especially a jumper, may have a high neck or a V-neck, and a female may choose to wear a jumper with a sufficiently low neck to reveal a lot of cleavage. One characteristic that women’s jumpers mostly share, however, is that they are a snug fit. Men’s jumpers tend to be more loosely fitting, whether bulky or of a thinner weave.

Nowadays all of these garments may be made from cotton or various man-made

fibres instead the traditional (knitted) wool, so they may be worn over a shirt or blouse, directly over underwear or even without any undergarments. Finally, when a jumper is part of a school uniform, it almost always has a demure V-neck

Any of the above may be called pullovers if they are put on over one's head. Similarly, any of them may be called cardigans if they have buttons up the front. The name comes from the inventor of this type of garment, Lord Cardigan (1797-1868).

Klaxon.

Originally it was a mechanical horn with a harsh, rasping sound and was often found on automobiles or emergency vehicles. Its sound came from metal striking metal repeatedly. Nowadays, though, a klaxon is often an electric horn with a conical diaphragm to concentrate and direct the sound. Whatever the mechanism a klaxon is always very loud, and an appropriate metaphor for a doorbell ringing in poor Samantha's ear "the morning after the night before".

"Lie back and think of England"

has been a common phrase in Britain for a long time. Traditionally, it was advice given to a woman about having sex with her husband. The assumption once was that women were not expected to view sex as pleasurable; instead, they were to view sex as a duty, performed essentially through passive availability. Since women weren't expected to participate in sex in any meaningful way, or to derive any special pleasure from sex, it made sense for them to think of something else during sexual acts. Contemplating the continuity of the Empire, through conception and child-rearing, might even make the sexual act more pleasant.

The origins of the phrase are unclear, but it is generally attributed to a Lady Alice Hillingdon. She allegedly wrote in her journal in 1912, "I am happy now that George calls on my bedchamber less frequently than of old. As it is, I now endure but two calls a week, and when I hear his steps outside my door I lie down on my bed, close my eyes, open my legs and think of England." However, her journal has never been found and this quotation remains unverified.

The phrase also appears in a much earlier letter by Queen Victoria, but there Her Majesty was referring to childbirth and not to sex. In the 1960s the woman at the centre of the "Profumo sex scandal", Christine Keeler stated in a newspaper interview, "When I was lying back, the last thing I was thinking about was England." This was ironic as Ms. Keeler was accused of, although never actually charged with, passing state secrets from her English lover and member of the Macmillan government to her Russian lover, a naval attaché at the Soviet mission in London.

Nowadays the phrase has lost most of its sexual innuendo and is often used when a member of either sex is being asked to do something unpalatable. During a recent television discussion on global warming (I'm writing this in November '06) after the publication of an apocalyptic government-sponsored report on the subject, someone in the audience asked with a completely straight face, "What are we supposed to do now? Lie back and think of Earth?" A member of the panel replied soberly and succinctly, "Yes."

Lift.

The transport device used to move goods or people vertically is called an elevator in North America. Elsewhere in the English-speaking world, elevators are more commonly known as lifts. Other languages may have loanwords based on either elevator (e.g. Japanese) or lift (Cantonese).

Off-licence or "offie".

A shop with a licence to sell alcoholic beverages for consumption off the premises only. Such a licence is only available from local magistrates and will always specify one or more responsible individuals, one of whom must usually be present when the shop is open. The licence will also delineate the shop's opening hours. Even the branch of a national supermarket will require a separate licence from local magistrates to sell alcohol.

The licensee's most important responsibility is to ensure that no under-age customers are sold alcohol. A complaint from the police concerning this to the magistrates could cause the licence to be suspended, and thus the shop to close, pending a fuller investigation. Unless the police are shown to have made a mistake, the shop will not be compensated for any loss of trade. By the way, the defence of "She looked like she was eighteen, m'lord" will usually not suffice.

Outer Hebrides.

A chain of islands off the northwest coast of Scotland, they are also used metaphorically to refer to some place very remote, in a similar way to how "Outer Mongolia" and "Timbuktu" are often used.

Pargeusia (or Parageusia)

is an arcane medical term, so specialised that it does not appear in the Chambers Dictionary. Its earlier form, parageusia, has in fact been dropped from the dictionary while the modern word has yet to reappear therein. Whilst parageusia may once have suggested dysfunctional attitudes or the formation of inappropriate tastes or opinions, nowadays pargeusia is purely a medical condition and one of several disorders to our sense of taste. Specifically it is a distortion or perversion in the perception of something one is trying to taste, in contrast to phantosmia, which is a perception of taste that occurs in the absence of any taste stimulant. (Okay, we admit it. My editor and I are linguistic snobs, but the modern word describes a condition most of us are aware of and surely should be "in the dictionary".)

Petrol and gas.

The standard fuel for internal combustion and aircraft engines, known as gasoline in the US and Canada, is called petrol in Britain, Ireland and the rest of the British Commonwealth. In these same countries the word, gas, as a domestic or industrial fuel, is absolutely limited to the colourless gaseous substance that is often called natural gas elsewhere, or to other gaseous fuels such as coal gas, which is produced from the distillation of coal. Coal gas was much used for domestic heating, cooking and lighting in the past, but has now been almost completely superseded by natural gas.

Petting Zoo.

The aforementioned American editor didn't know this term. "WordNet" gives the definition as: "a collection of docile animals for children to pet and feed".

Pleaded

is the correct past tense of plead in Britain, rather than the American form, pled.

PTO or P.T.O.

is a standard British abbreviation for "Please turn over". It indicates that what is written continues on the other side of the same sheet of paper. It may even appear on official documents, as well as on informal correspondence or notes.

Pub or "local".

The English (or Irish) Pub, short for "public house", is the standard social drinking establishment throughout Britain and Ireland. A pub near someone's house which they go to frequently is often referred to by them as their "local".

While many urban pubs now have been modernised to simulate the bars of other countries (we often call such places "theme pubs" rather disparagingly), as soon as you leave the centre of town, almost all pubs that you will discover continue to maintain their traditional style.

A pub is often divided into two completely separate rooms**, a "public bar" (or "saloon bar") and a "lounge bar". The public bar will be the noisy room, with dartboards and pool tables, juke box and the occasional karaoke machine, and nowadays the ubiquitous wide-screen television. The lounge by contrast is almost always quieter with a plusher décor. Often only bar snacks are available in the public bar while meals are served in the lounge.

The "landlord" or "landlady" (the normal titles and forms of address for the man or woman in charge of the pub) will usually enforce the more exclusive nature of the lounge by charging slightly more for the drinks in there. Even in the most down-at-heel waterfront dive, this simple pricing technique will guarantee some degree of exclusivity to the lounge. Thus it is not unusual to find the lounge bar deserted or nearly so, particularly on a weekday evening.

By the way the legal drinking age throughout England is 18 at time of writing but it would not be surprising if that age had dropped a year or two by the time of this collection.

Rubber.

In addition to most of the expected meanings of this word, a rubber in Britain is also an eraser. This includes the small item at the back end of a pencil, the larger item often found in a pencil case and the even larger item used to clean chalk from a blackboard. We call these items rubbers because originally they were bits of india-rubber, a gummy substance obtained from various tropical plants, and are used for rubbing out.

It should also be mentioned in passing that in Britain condoms are never called rubbers, except in the old-fashioned euphemism, rubber goods.

Rugby player.

Rugby, sometimes referred to as "rugger", is an extremely physical contact sport, so its players perforce have well-developed muscular physiques. Even in the pre-Program present day, rugby teams have an endearing penchant for inviting reporters and cameras into the post-game locker room for interviews. As far as most of them seem to be concerned, nudity is not, nor should it be, an issue.

Rugby tackle.

As used in my stories, a rugby tackle is the same as an open-field tackle by a single defender in American football.

Scampi

is the plural of scampo, the Italian name for the Norway lobster. It is also known by the names "Dublin Bay Prawn" and "Langoustine". The fleshy tail of the Norway lobster is good eating, closer in both taste and texture to lobster and crayfish than to prawn or shrimp. Here in Britain the term, scampi usually describes a dish of shelled tail meat, coated in breadcrumbs or batter, deep-fried and served with chips. In the States, however, I believe scampi is a dish of shallow-fried shrimp, normally served in garlic butter. This entry has been adapted from Wikipedia***.

Sheffield steel.

Like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Hamilton, Ontario, Sheffield has been known at first as an "Iron City" and later as a "Steel City" since the middle of the nineteenth century because of its large iron and steel industry. With much heavy industrial production now moved to countries where multinational corporations can make higher profits, e.g. Eastern Europe and China, Sheffield does not produce nearly as much steel as it used to nor any real quantity of iron. However, many innovations in the industry were developed locally, including crucible and stainless steel. This has allowed Sheffield to maintain a much smaller but highly profitable precision steel industry. Sheffield steel cutlery remains a market leader and for an Englishman to call a knife or any cutting tool "as sharp as Sheffield steel" is high praise.

Smörgåsbord.

A large, buffet-style meal, originating from Sweden, it usually consists of small servings of many hot and cold dishes. The Swedish word literally means "sandwich table". The word can also be used in English, as we've done here, to indicate an available selection of pleasant but diverse choices. More information may be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smorgasbord. ***

Sneaked

is the correct past tense of sneak in Britain, rather than the American form, snuck.

Spag bol

is a colloquial abbreviation for spaghetti alla Bolognese, which is spaghetti served with a minced beef and tomato sauce. However, "spag bol" is often misapplied in Britain to any spaghetti dish, regardless of its sauce. The name comes from the Italian town of Bologna and the traditional Bolognese sauce contains rather less tomato than is usually served in Britain.

Tenterhooks.

A person is said to be "on tenterhooks" when s/he is waiting impatiently for something to occur, and the phrase always implies impatience. The word comes from the step in cloth making when the new cloth is cleansed to remove impurities and is stretched for that purpose across a tenter, or large frame, and secured with tenterhooks. In a somewhat unusual case of linguistic punning, the suspension of the cloth across the tenter became a symbol for human emotional suspense.

Test match.

A test match is an international sports contest, especially in cricket, between representative national sides. They are usually played as a series of two to six such matches. Each cricket test may last from three to six days, but nowadays most tests are five days long, and the remainder four days long.

If anyone spots other cultural or linguistic differences which seem to make it a challenge to understand the Heather Collection, please let me know by email: cg@nakedinschool.net

---

I'd really love to hear what you think. I welcome criticism and compliments alike, (okay, I guess I prefer compliments, I'm only human!)
While these stories are in progress, I'd also welcome suggestions and ideas. If I don't use an idea in this story, perhaps I will later.
Chrissy Giles
Email cg@nakedinschool.net

"Heather collection" - main page

---

* Department For Education and Skills - I have adopted the name used at the time of writing. British politicians seem to delight in shuffling departments around, and the name and scope of the government Department of Education has been known to change from time to time, for example to include "Employment". Click here to return to cultural note on "Headmaster"

** The names given to the two pub rooms vary from place to place throughout Britain and Ireland. The "noisy" and "quiet" rooms may be called respectively the public bar and lounge bar or the saloon bar and lounge bar or even occasionally the public bar and saloon bar. I have chosen the first option for this collection. Click here to return to cultural note on "Pub"