

Forgotten English

"This well-researched book tells the stories of lost words in loving detail. . . . If you enjoy expeditions into the verbal past, this one is sure to please." —*The San Diego Union Tribune*

MUMPSIMUS

SCANDAROON

STANGSTER

GORGAYSE

HOBNAIL

TEREBINTH

PIEPOWDER

BILLINGSGATRY

SCARAMOUCHE

BYTESHEIP

TWYCHILD

FULLUHT

UPAS

FOTADL

KINGSEVIL

SUCCUBUS

NIGHT-HAG

FRIPPERY

A Merry Guide to Antiquated Words, Packed

with History, Fun Facts, Literary Excerpts,

and Charming Drawings

Jeffrey Kacirk

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Have you ever sent a message via scanderoon, needed a nimgimmer, or fallen victim to bowelhive? Never heard of these terms? That's because they are a thing of the past. These words are alive and well, however, in *Forgotten English*, a charming collection of hundreds of archaic words, their definitions, and old-fashioned line drawings. For readers of Bill Bryson, Henry Beard, and Richard Lederer, *Forgotten English* is an eye-opening trip down a delightful etymological path. Readers learn that an ale connor sat in a puddle of ale to judge its quality, that a beemaster informed bees of any important household events, and that our ancestors had a saint for hangover sufferers, St. Bibiana, a fact pertinent to the word bibulous. Each selection is accompanied by literary excerpts demonstrating the word's usage, from sources such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Chaucer, and Benjamin Franklin. Entertaining as well as educational, *Forgotten English* is a fascinating addition to word lovers' books.

Forgotten English Details

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Author : Jeffrey Kacirk

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Michael says

Fascinating, if fanciful, musing on words and their lost meanings. Not in the least academic - I suspect some of the author's assertions would not withstand scholarly scrutiny - but entertaining on every page - a good bathroom book.

Stacy says

Some interesting details and anecdotes, but many of the words are hardly "forgotten" and, with some of the more outlandish entries, there's very little evidence given to suggest the terms were in common usage.

David Ward says

[Forgotten English: A Merry Guide to Antiquated Words, Packed with History, Fun Facts, Literary Excerpts, and Charming Drawings](#) by Jeffrey Kacirk (Quill William Morrow 1997) (422.0) is an interesting read for those curious about the origins of common speech in the English language. A number of these words are still in use today if one knows where to look (e.g., ambergris, scaramouch, pismire, hobnail, press-gang). My rating: 6/10, finished 11/21/11.

Michael says

FLITCH

A side of various game animals, from as long ago as the early eighth century, and recently only applied to bacon. The phrase, "to bring home the bacon," developed during the fourteenth century in the Essex county town of Dunmow, England. Dunmow records show that a noblewoman attempted to encourage marital contentment by offering a gammon, or side of bacon called a dunmow flitch, to any couple who would swear that for the past year they had not had a household brawl or wished themselves unmarried. The claimant couple was sometimes verbally examined before a panel of six bachelors and six unmarried maidens. This flitch became a symbol of domestic happiness, but, by 1772, only eight of these prizes were awarded - and these to men only. An abridged version of the oath reads:

You shall swear by custom of confession,
If ever you made a nuptial transgression,
Or, since the parish-clerk and the Amen,
You wish'd yourselves unmarried again,
But continued true in thought and desire
As when you joined hands in the quire.

A whole gammon of bacon you shall receive,
And bear it hence with love and good leave;
For this is our custom at Dunmow well known,
Though the pleasure be ours, the bacon's your own.

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Bacon. Gotta love it.

Amos says

Entertaining

Terrence says

Not as engaging as I had hoped for, yet interesting enough to finish. What did I learn from this? Well, now I know what "lant" is. Look it up.

Margie says

I especially enjoyed the many examples of word usage, and the extensive bibliography.

sologdin says

Similar to the *Superior Person's Book of Words* insofar as it attempts to recover and popularize cool words. Contains etymologies, quotations of usage, and other bits regarding ancient terms long fallen into desuetude.

Recommended for astrologamages, rattoners, and fribblers.

King Ævil says

The selection of "forgotten" English words featured were nicely amusing and strange, as were many of the superstitions and puzzling rituals behind them, but at least a quarter of them aren't really forgotten—at least to anyone who is reasonably well read. Unfortunately, quite a few of the quotes from long-dead authors had so little to do with the subject that they brought to mind a non-forgotten, non-English term, "non sequitur". Also, the illustrations looked like they might be topical and entertaining, but since most were smaller than a generic US postage stamp I guess I'll never know for sure until I get my electron microscope back from the

shop.

Beth says

Entertaining. Kacirk explains how some of these "forgotten" words are actually still used to today in different permutations. It was a nice twist to be educated about language and laughing out loud at the same time. I recommend this book to anyone who loves the history of english.

Sara says

When I was in college, I took a linguistics and etymology course that was one of my favorites. This book made me think of that course. It is a compendium of words once common and no longer used, where they came from, what they meant, and in some cases what they have morphed into over time.

Petty-fogger - a term that is exactly what it sounds like--someone who promotes quarrels or encourages going to law for trivial reasons. Can't imagine why we lost that word, but I think today we just call them ambulance-chasers.

Usufruct - Which was just to indicate the right of anyone to windfall fruit. The shepherds would take their crooks and pull fruit down, which is the origin of the current meaning of the word crook. How neat is that?

Scaramouch - a fencing term that evolved into a modern football "skirmish".

Uzzle Pye - This one blew me away. Know the nursery rhyme "Sing a song of sixpence"? When the pie was open the birds began to sing. Did you ever take that literally? I didn't. Well, seems they actually made pies, baked the crusts, tethered live birds in them, put a crust on top and then released the birds in a celebration.

Scuttled-Butt - A spot on the ship where sailors gathered to gossip. So, if you heard it at the scuttled butt, you passed it on. And, of course, it became scuttlebutt, which we still like to get in on from time to time.

And one that I did recognize right away:

Resurrectionist - A grave robber who exhumed bodies and sold them to scientist. The practice and the need for the term have gone, thankfully, but we still have the literary figure of Jerry Cruncher in *A Tale of Two Cities* to give an accurate depiction of what was entailed in the trade.

Needless to say, this is just a minor sampling of the words and stories included in this interesting book. I love words, and I read a number of classics where I am likely to run into some of these archaic terms, so the book serves a more immediate purpose. If you are like me, and you think words are worth studying in and of themselves, dig in, this one is fun.

"He hath been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scrapes"* - William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost

Dan Schwent says

Forgotten English is a collection of antiquated words and their histories.

When I saw this book, I was picturing a dictionary full of words that have fallen out of favor. While it is that, it's also a lot more.

Forgotten English contains a lot of words, some seldom used, some probably never uttered aloud in several centuries, and a lot of fun facts pertaining to them. Did you know that a stirrup-cup, a mug of some alcoholic beverage handed to a horsed patron of a tavern as he leaves, is the origin of the phrase "one for the road?" That's just one of the words within. Don't get me started on Scanderoon, Nimgimmer, or Kingsevil....

Some of the entries ran a little long. I would have preferred more definitions and less of the fluffier bits. The writing style was pretty good and I probably would have enjoyed this book more if I hadn't just read *The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way* by Bill Bryson.

This book was not precisely what I imagined but I enjoyed it just the same. 3 out of 5 stars.

Mary Beth says

Having read a considerable amount on the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, this book helped in interpreting some of the vocabulary used by the authors. Easy quick read.

Lee says

At first, I took umbrage with the title of this little book. *Forgotten English* suggests we'd be treated to a dictionary of sorts, full of archaic English words, long since fallen out of favour. And yet, early on, we're told about *buggerly* and *succubi* and *gammon* and *ambergris* and *hobnails*. Sure, I probably wouldn't use all of those words in polite conversation, and definitely not in the same sentence, but forgotten? Not really.

I chalked this up to the book's American origins and figured it should be called *Old Words from British English that are Mostly Forgotten in the UK and, Like, Definitely not Heard in the US*. With that I was ready to polish off the book and get on with my new-found career of giving new, accurate titles to old works of literature.

But then I realised that I'd totally missed the point. *Forgotten English* isn't a dictionary of obsolete words, it's a ramble through the hills of historical esoterica that the UK has to offer. It uses archaic English words as jumping off points for fascinating little insights into the peculiar customs, idioms, and idiosyncrasies that these islands once harboured. Like the entry for *bee-master*, which, we learn, was the name given to bee-keepers on estates. That's a cute name but not particularly interesting. (Although I have to admit that being "master of the bees" sounds way cooler than just being their keeper.) But from there we learn that the bee-master's duties weren't just tending to the hives, he also had to inform the bees of any deaths in the family, and help them go into mourning when such a death happened. Back in the day, when someone on the estate

died even the bee hives wore black. Such fascinating trivia abound through the book, making it much more fun than your average dictionary.

Eustacia Tan says

I took my time reading this book and I'm glad I did, because it's a book that should be savoured in small doses. *Forgotten English* is a book about words that have fallen out of use. Some I actually knew/had heard about, some are the predecessors of modern words, and some flabbergasted me. The words are organised by theme, such as drink, occupation, love, etc., and each word contains the meaning and a brief history of it.

Most of the time, this history includes examples of how the word was used, with lots of quotations from old texts.

I found this to be very illuminating and enjoyable. Sure, we probably won't be using these words in our daily lives, but the history of English is a fascinating topic that I don't normally think about. It was really fun to learn something new about something that I thought I already knew.

Words that are explained include:

Mocteroof: which is used for the craft of "frubbingish" or making damaged fruits and vegetables look good (and the entry explains how)

Mob fair: which is a job hunting fair for domestic and agricultural workers

Purl-men: 18th and 19th century beer-sellers who sold their beer on the Thames and other rivers

Lettice-cap: a medical appliance that resembles a hair net (although lettuce was probably not used)

Gorgayse: a Middle English word which means "elegant, fashionable" and is the predecessor of the word gorgeous

And much more!

You really don't have to be a wordsmith to enjoy this book. As long as you like the English language and/or history, you'll enjoy reading this.

This review was first posted at [Inside the mind of a Bibliophile](#)
