

## LOCAL WORDS OF SOUTH BUCKS, ESPECIALLY THE THAMES VALLEY.

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THE tremendous increase of intercommunication between all parts of the country during the last few years, due mainly to the facilities offered by the network of railways, is rapidly killing off all local variations from "Queen's English." A secondary cause is also at work—the increase of education; but this is a factor of very much less importance than the first-named.

No part of the country has altered more during the last generation (thirty years) than the Thames Valley.

When my brother and I first began as small boys—somewhat longer ago than that—to haunt the river, it was frequented by bargees; by professional fishermen; by stray "parties" from London—disciples of Izaak Walton—who hired the fishermen and their punts by the day; and by very few besides.

Of the 4,000 and odd inhabitants of Great Marlow, other than those suggested, one's fingers would almost suffice to count those who ever went afloat; while the fingers of one hand would be enough to enumerate those who did so at all frequently; and a boat-load of Cockney tourists was a *rara avis* only seen now and again during a whole summer. Now, on the contrary, the river valley is fairly swarming during the entire summer with thousands of tourists; the odious steam launches are ubiquitous; while there are scores of local "oarsmen" for whom the river in the old quiet days had no attractions, but who, now that it has become the fashion, have developed aquatic habits. The old race of bargees is almost gone; the present steam launch man being a poor substitute. These changes have also nearly put an end to the use of many local riverside words, and I believe

that some few of those in the list which follows, will be novelties to many persons.

In compiling the list, I have given only such words as I have myself heard used in this part of the country; and I have, with very few exceptions, excluded words that are common to a large extent of the country,\* even though they are not found in Johnson.

I am well aware that there must be many local words with which I am unacquainted, and others which I have forgotten; but imperfect as this list doubtless is, I believe it will be of some slight degree of interest:—

ATHIRT (for *athwart*), across.

BACK-EDDY, an eddy.

BACKER, to give anyone, to thrash. "I'll give him backer," is somewhat equivalent to the better-known expression, "I'll give him something he won't like." (Should the word be *'bacca*, for tobacco?)

BALLAST, shingle dredged from the river-bed.

BASH, to beat; of bushes, or the surface of the river, to drive birds, fish, etc. The Slang Dictionary also gives it in the sense of corporal punishment.

BAT-MOUSE } The various species of Bats are not distin-  
BAT-RAT } guished, but any large specimen (generally a Noctule) is called a Bat-rat; while the smaller species (of which the most common is the *Pepistrelle*) are called Bat-mice.

BIRD-CHERRY, often means the White-beam tree (*Pyrus aria*), instead of the real Bird-cherry (*Cerasus padus*).

BLOW-FLY, a Blue Bottle Fly; FLY-BLOWS, the ova of flies.

BLUE-HAWK, generally means the Sparrow-hawk (*Accipiter nisus*).

BOTTLE-TIT, the Long-tailed Titmouse (*Acredula caudata*).

BRITTON, or BRITTON-BOARD (? spelling), the bottom- or flooring-boards of a boat or punt. Halliwell gives "*Brittene*: to cut up; to carve; to break, or divide into fragments." Brittons are made in

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\* E. G., *afeard* for afraid; *be* for all persons, singular and plural, of the present indicative of that irregular auxiliary; and the negative forms *be-ant*, and *baint*; *rheumatics* for rheumatism.

sections for facility in taking up and replacing, but whether that is the meaning of the present word does not seem at all obvious.

**BUCKS**, a staging erected across stream, on piles driven into the river-bed. It may either be at a weir, with sluices, for the passage of barges and boats before the use of locks, such as is now known to most people as a *flood-gate*; or it may be an **EEL BUCKS**, which is a staging with wicker baskets, or *wheels*, for the catching of eels.

**CAMP-SHEATHING**. (Usually so spelt, but pronounced *Camp-shedding*, occasionally *camp-shiding*.) Boarding put up along the river edge, to prevent the bank being continually washed away by the water. A similar association of shed and sheath is given by Halliwell, under the word *Shed*—"The *sheath* of a knife (Eastern Counties)." "The fundamental purpose of the sheath is undoubtedly the protection of the sword,"\* so probably *Camp-sheathing* is the protection of the field.

**CLAM**, to seize. Skeat explains it "to adhere," from A.-S. *clam*, clay. *Clamm'd* (or *clemm'd*) *with cold* means numb, or "perished."

**CRAFT**, a lighter; a large form of barge used in the tidal waters about London. They are built up the river, and taken down stream once for all; they are used in the tide-way without a rudder, and are worked by sweeps (long oars); a temporary rudder of rough boards is fitted for the passage down the upper river.

**DAB-CHICK**, sometimes **DABBER**, the Little Grebe (*Podiceps fluviatilis*).

**DAWSEY**, drowsy.

**DEVIL**, the Swift (*Cypselus apus*).

**DIP-NET**, a small hand-net, for catching fish from the well of a punt.

**DISH-WASHER**, a Wagtail; especially the Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla lugubris*), the commonest British species.

**DOUT**, to extinguish (as a candle). Mentioned in Webster's Dictionary as obsolete, and derived from *do out*.† Not in Johnson (4th Edit., folio, 1773).

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\* Wedgwood's "Dictionary of English Etymology," 1888.

† Cf. *don* and *doff*.

- DRESS, manure.
- DRUCKSEY, unsound (of wood).
- DUMB-DOLLIES, posts set across the entrance to a footpath, to allow the passage of pedestrians, to the exclusion of vehicles.
- EFFETT, a Newt (*Triton*, etc.); LAND-EFFETT, a Lizard (*Lacerta*, etc.); all species firmly believed to bite with fatal consequences.
- EYOT (pronounced like the number *eight*), contracted to AIT, an island on the river. *Ey* is Teutonic for an island; Anglo-Saxon *ea*; Norse *ö*. Eyot is the diminutive.\* Skeat says it is "from M.E. *ei*, an island, Stratmann, p. 147; with the dimin. suffix. *-et*, which is properly of F. origin."
- FAGOT, a contemptuous term for a woman. (Mentioned in Slang Dictionary.)
- FLAKE-HURDLE, a hurdle made of split willow timber, in distinction to one woven of willow rods.
- FORE-RIGHT, opposite.
- FRENCH MAGPIE, the Green Woodpecker (*Gecinus viridis*).
- FRIT, frightened.
- FRIZ, frozen.
- GALLUS, very, extremely. Spelt by Halliwell, *gallows*, and no doubt as the gallows was the extreme of all things, so a "gallus good fellow" would mean the *ne plus ultra* of good fellowship. Mentioned in Slang Dictionary, and the word is originally, doubtless, Cockney slang, and not a local production.
- GAFFER, a head labourer.
- GENTLES, fly-grubs (maggots), used as bait for roach-fishing.
- GRASS-MOUSE, the common Field-Vole (*Arvicola agrestis*).
- HOWSOEVER, however.
- HAMPSHIRE-SKIFF, a carvel-built, flat-bottomed boat, something on the model of a punt, and fitted with a "well," "till," etc., but with pointed bow and tapered stern, with stern-post for rudder; for punting or sculling; handy for river shooting or fishing.
- HANSER (-CORD) (? spelling). When a barge is moored at

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\* Taylor's "Words and Places," p. 330.

a place where the water is too shallow to allow of its coming close alongside the bank, barge-poles are placed at an angle to prevent its getting aground; round their T-shaped tops and belaying-pins inside the gunwale of the barge (see under *Tampin*), a turn is taken with a short piece of very pliable rope—of manilla, I fancy—made expressly, and called *hanser* or *hanser-cord*. Can the word refer to the old Hanseatic League, this pliable cord being first made at one of the Hanseatic towns? The word *Hanse* is given by Halliwell as “the upper part of a door frame,” which does not seem likely to be the word wanted. In the churchwardens’ accounts of Great Marlow, for 1673, is a charge for “hasser to splice a Rope,” which is probably the same word. The word being invariably pronounced aspirated, it is by no means unlikely that its first letter is in reality *A*.

HAPS, a hasp.

HAWSEY-BUSH (pronounced *Harsey-*), a haw-thorn.

HORNET, applied to the stag beetle, is, perhaps, merely a misnomer, or case of mistaken identity.

HOUSEN, plural of *house*.

KERNEL, a swelling on the flesh. On my enquiring of a labourer after his wife, who was ill, he replied that he did not know what was the matter with her, but she had come out all over *kernel*s.

LAY DOWN (*intransitive*), for, to lie down, almost universally used.

LAY-BY, an extra fishing rod, laid ready to hand, so as to seize directly a fish takes the bait, in addition to the rod held in hand.

LOB-WORM, the common Earth-worm (*Lumbricus terrestris*).

MAGPIE-YAFFEL, the Greater Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*). Doubtless applied to the Lesser species also.

MANY-LEGS, a centipede (*Arthronomalus*), or a millepede (*Julus*). Used for both.

MAY-BUG, the cock-chaffer (*Melolantha vulgaris*).

MOLL-HERON, a Heron (*Ardea cinerea*). In composition, *heron* is generally a dissyllable; by itself a monosyllable—*hern*.

MONEY-SPINNER, a species of spider (*Aranea scenica*).

"I'll soon shoot him out!" from a very small boy, to whom one has just consigned one's horse and trap in an inn-yard, sounds rather flippant to anyone not accustomed to the language of the country! Among the many thousands of papers preserved at Claydon House, I met with\* "A Terrar of a Yard Land Bought of Thomas Robinson of Buckingham." It is undated, but evidently belongs to (the second half of) the eighteenth century. In it "shooting" comes constantly: as "One Land in Coppid Moores shooting into Brackley way," etc.; "Two Lands shooting upon Bitters Sweet Ash," etc.; "Two Butts shooting in Baldwyn's Meadow," etc.

**SKEWETTING**, wooden-skewer making. Formerly almost the only trade in Marlow, and elsewhere; now nearly, if not quite, extinct. Dog-wood was, I believe, always the material used.

**SKIPT** (for **SKIFF**), almost any form of rowing-boat.

**SLACK-LINE**, in topping trees when ropes are employed, the rope which takes the weight of the severed portion, and by which it is eased down to the ground, is so called.

**SLEEPY-MOUSE**, the Dormouse (*Myoxus avellanarius*).

**SONNIE**, and **MY SON**, an ordinary address in conversation.

**SQUITCH-GRASS**, couch grass (*Triticum repens*).

**STAG**, "to stag," among workmen, is equivalent to "keeping *cave*" among schoolboys, *i.e.*, to watch for, and give timely notice of, the approach of the master. Once, some quarter of a century ago, a Marlow builder had some work going on in close proximity to a public-house. Coming one day to see how things progressed, he was surprised to find not one of his men visible, but in their place a half-witted man. The puzzled builder asked the half-wit where the men were, and was told they were in the public. "Oh, really! and, pray, what are *you* doing here?" "Stagging the old 'un!" replied the imbecile, who, with the best intentions, had quite lost the point of his instructions.

**SUMMER-SNIPE**, the Common Sandpiper (*Totanus hypoleucus*).

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\* By kind permission of the Rt. Hon. Sir Harry Verney, Bart.

- SWIM, a "pitch" for bottom-fishing. I may here note that the flow of the river is always spoken of as the "stream;" the word "current" is never heard in the mouth of a native.
- TAMPIN, a piece of white-thorn wood, about 7 or 8 inches long, to which one end of a hanser cord (*quod vide*) is made fast. The hanser is then run *inwards* through a hole in the gunwale of the barge, and hangs ready for use, the *tampin* stopping the other end from passing through the gunwale.
- TAYLOR, the Bleak (= a fish, *Alburnus lucidus*).
- THRUSHER, also THRESHER, and THRASHER, a Thrush.
- TILL, the locker in the stern of a punt. Palsgrave has "Tyll of an almary," which Skeat explains as "a kind of cupboard or cabinet."
- TITTER-TOTTER, a see-saw (children's game).
- TITTY, small, little. "Give it a titty tap," = hit it gently. "A titty wren" (commonly "tatty") = a little wren. Skeat says *Tit* is Scandinavian. [*Tite* is Danish for a Titmouse (*Parus*), and *Titing* is used in Norway for a Pipit (*Anthus*), but *Tit* is not used out of composition.] *Titmouse* is from *Tit*, small, and [A.-S.] *māse*, a name for several kinds of small birds.
- TODPOLE, a Miller's-thumb, or Bull-head (= a fish, *Cottus gobio*), apparently in distinction to the genuine Tadpole.
- TOFT, a "swell," recently known as a "masher." Toft, like the latter, is, no doubt, London slang, not a genuine S. Bucks word.
- UNKID or UNKED. Webster gives the word as corrupted from uncouth, and explains it as odd, strange, ugly, old, lonely, dreary.
- UNLOOSE, to let go. In fishing from a punt, when about to change the "pitch," the fisherman requested the person at the stern end to "unloose," or else to "ease her a-going," when he wanted the lanyard let go, which held the punt to the ryepeck at that end.
- WAG-WANTON, the quaking grass (*Briza media*). *Wag* is to shake to and fro; *Wanton*, unrestrained.
- WIDBIN-PEAR, the White-beam tree (*Pyrus aria*). Sometimes called Bird-cherry.

WITHY, willow. A.-S., *withig*.\*

WUM, the ripple caused by any disturbance of water.

WUSSER, the narrow kind of barge for canal work, almost always gaily painted; usually seen two abreast on the wide river. Called elsewhere "Monkey-boat," or "Fly-boat."

YAFFEL, the Green Woodpecker (*Gecinus viridis*).

Besides the above,

ANEUST, nearly, is in common use, but as I cannot recollect ever having personally heard it used, I have not put it in its ordinary place. Mr. John Parker, F.S.A., kindly informs me that he remembers his father (the author of the well-known "History of Wycombe"), quoting a man who had remarked that something was "very much aneust the matter," which he would interpret as "very much to the point."

Mr. A. G. Bridgeman, who has reminded me of two or three of the above words, which I was forgetting, tells me of the four following, which I did not know of:—

CHEESE-LOG, a Wood-louse (*Porcellio, Oniscus, and Armadillo*).

GRASS, applied to all Clovers. BLACK GRASS, the Hop Trefoil (*Trifolium procumbens*).

PEN-STOCK, a single sluice to a drain. Halliwell describes it as a floodgate, erected to keep in or let out water from a millpond as occasion may require.

TAR-NETTLE, tarred-twine.

The Mid- and North-Bucks word BEVER (obviously connected with the French *Boire, to drink*†), meaning what is elsewhere known as "Lunch," or in S. Bucks as "Eleven o'clock," "Four o'clock," etc, I have never heard in this part of the county. I have met with the word in churchwardens' accounts of (I think) the seventeenth century; not in this county, however, but, I believe, Oxfordshire.

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\* Wedgwood's Dictionary.

† *Buueur*, a drinker; *Buwant* (adj.), drinking.