



CLICK FOR **MORE INFORMATION**

# THE SPECTATOR

HOME COFFEEHOUSE BLOGS THE WEEK COLUMNISTS FEATURES **BOOKS** ARTS LIFE PODCAST EVENTS SHOP

Bookends

## 'Ware's Victorian Dictionary of Slang and Phrase', by J. Redding Ware - review

Christopher Howse 9 March 2013

0 Comments

**Ware's Victorian Dictionary of Slang and Phrase** *J. Redding Ware*  
Bodleian Library, pp.382, £25, ISBN: 1851242627

0

James Redding Ware, with his idiosyncratic treatment of slang, plunges the reader straight into the late 19th-century Bartholomew Fair of undeserving paupers, loafers, Ally Slopers, theatrical types and demi-mondaines.

0

Like

He drew on his own Grub Street life for this discursive lexicon, from A.D. ('a drink') to Zulu Express (the nickname for a Great Western service), published, days before his death in 1909, as *Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang and Phrase*. The Bodder has faked it up nicely in smudgy facsimile, with burgundy end-papers, a new title and an introduction by John Simpson of the OED, who devours dictionaries with his morning porridge.

0

Ware, born in 1832, served time for threatening his father, a Southwark cheesemonger, with a bacon-knife. Sinking into magazine journalism, he also wrote pseudonymous fiction, notably *The Female Detective* in 1864. The story in his pamphlet, *The Road Murder*, was retold with élan by Kate Summerscale in 2008 as *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*.

0

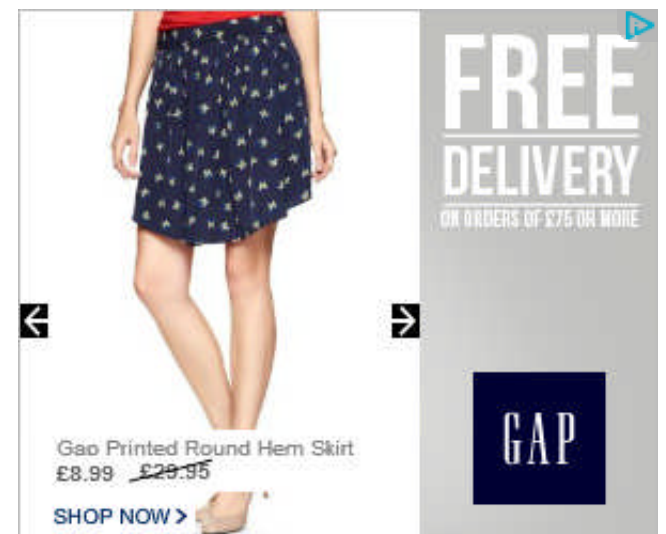
In Ware's London a toff was in trouble if he took the wrong turning. 'Who did you say?' is one of the phrases he records, to be used out of the blue by one loafer to another in the hearing of any passing personage looking at all self-important.

Perhaps the most surprising insult recorded by Ware is Silly moo!, 'said generally of a stupid woman', as Alf Garnett would agree. But then, Johnny Speight was born, across the river, only 11 years after Ware's death.

This article first appeared in the print edition of *The Spectator* magazine, dated **9 March 2013**

Tags: [Book review](#), [Christopher Howse](#), [Language](#), [Slang](#), [The Suspicions of Mr Whicher](#), [Victorian era](#)

12 ISSUES  
FOR **£12**  
**SUBSCRIBE NOW**



### MOST POPULAR

Read Shared Commented

1. The BBC and Religion
2. Afriyie fails the interview test
3. Christopher Hitchens's lefty publisher begged from him – and then betrayed him
4. Which Tories will be Hacked Off's useful idiots?
5. Can you trust the Tories to organise a Tory conference?
6. Freedom for Shetland!
7. The Chinese water torture of everyday sexism
8. Harriet Harman and Maria Miller both claim victory in Leveson talks
9. Russell Brand on heroin, abstinence and addiction
10. Can animals really be gay?

### ARCHIVE

Select Month

### LATEST BLOGS

**Why the Tories don't think the Leveson deal is statutory underpinning**

ALSO ON THE SPECTATOR

**Christopher Hitchens's lefty publisher begged from him – and then betrayed ...**

47 comments

**Can animals really be gay?** 37 comments

**The Chinese water torture of everyday sexism** 18 comments

**If Cambridge's debating girls can't stand the heat, they should stay out of ...**

316 comments

AROUND THE WEB

**Winter Vacation Part 5: 5 Museums to Visit This Winter** Chevrolet

**In Good Economic Times and in Bad, Money Is Often a Source of Strife**

Citi Women & Co.

**7 Tips For The Do-It-Yourself Debt Manager** Investopedia

**Smokers, Forget Your Lungs, Worry About Your Brain!** First To Know

What's this?

**Isabel Hardman**

When art imitates Wee Dougie Alexander **Steerpike**

Number 10: Cameron was awake and available throughout the negotiations

**James Forsyth**

The Scots are more generous than the English. What a Red Nose Day joke

**Rod Liddle**

Ministerial aides demand to support backbench vote on foreign criminals

**Isabel Hardman**

Press regulation: Ceci n'est pas une statue

**Isabel Hardman**

After Leveson and McCluskey, does Alex Salmond believe in the freedom of the press?

**Alex Massie**

0 comments



Leave a message...

Discussion | Community | Share

No one has commented yet.

Comment feed | Subscribe via email



CLICK FOR MORE INFORMATION

THE SPECTATOR

Subscribe

Spectator Plus  
Renew  
FAQs

Advertising

Classifieds  
Contact Us  
Media Pack  
Classified rates

Magazine

Subscribe  
FAQs  
Spectator Australia

All About Magazine

About  
Advertise  
Buy

Supplements

Spectator Life  
The cyber threat  
Independent schools

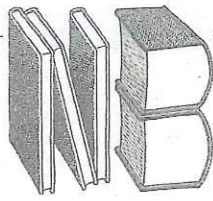
About Spectator

Spectator Journalists  
Privacy Policy  
Terms of use

The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London, SW1H 9HP

All articles and content Copyright © 2013 The Spectator (1828) Ltd | All rights reserved

Powered by WordPress & interconnect/it



## Dog my cat!

You know the feeling: When your kick is empty, and your mouth is dry, your blooming pals will not give you a yannep to get a drop of four thick. You could always crack a house and then back slang it. That way you run the risk of being binned, the fate of many a cross-life man.

Yes, you *do* know the feeling: the kick is your pocket, the four thick is nineteenth-century London's cheapest beer (at four pence a quart), the yannep the coin to pay for it. Cracking a house speaks for itself. To back slang it is to escape by the back door when the crushers (police) come in the front. Binned? Bartholomew Binns was a London hangman, and many a cross-life man (villain) unwillingly took on his name.

These splendid terms come from *Ware's Victorian Dictionary of Slang and Phrase*, first published as *Passing English* in 1909. Men known for chasing women were moll-hunters; if they nuptiated a moll, or a picker up, she became the burick. Watch out, though: "If the burick wears the kicksies, that's your luck, not ours". (The kicksies are trousers, where the kick is located.) Then another moll-hunter shows up to spoon the burick. Well, dog my cat, what a thought.

Ware collected enough slang to fill 270 pages, with roughly twenty items to a page. Where have they all gone? Does anyone now say, "Don't let the burick wear the kicksies"? When was the last time someone exclaimed "Dog my cat"? A half-hour gentleman seems an excellent phrase for "a man whose breed-

ing is only superficial" – a pity it's gone; in a word, churched. Some that have survived are less colourful. Chucking-out time is still used in pubs, and you might just meet the chucker-in-chief. Clobber remains clothing, if not "superior clothing", but we were surprised to see it described as "Jewish, E. London", with the etymology, "Hebrew 'KLBR'". Tick persists as slang for credit – to get something on tick – but the excellent "clock stopped" for "no tick" has gone. As has "the auctioneer" (the fist: "because it knocks down"), to be employed against any gigglemug who tries to spoon the burick.

Ware categorized slang: "Thieves", "Low", "Street", "Theatrical", etc. An enduring example of the last is "the bird", from the hissing sound a goose makes, which no actor wishes to hear. We learn that actors were molested outside theatres by cross-life men and threatened with the bird, "unless their tormentors were well paid to keep quiet". The "big bird",

on the other hand, was a form of approval: round about 1860, "theatre audiences began to compliment the stage-villain by politely hissing him, to prove how well he had played the scoundrel . . . . If he did not get the 'big bird' he might fear for the renewal of his engagement". Give the big bird to *Ware's Victorian Dictionary of Slang*, published by the Bodleian Library at £25.

Writers' autographs, contd (NB, passim). Mark-Georg Dehrmann writes from Hanover to tell us that the pursuit of autographs was a popular pastime in nineteenth-century Germany. "Goethe was not the first who had to cope with such requests from readers, but he came up with a solution that is both noteworthy and elegant." Tired of scribbling the desired specimen, but unwilling to appear impolite to admirers, Goethe turned to the new technology of lithography. "In the 1820s, he would etch a verse and his signature on a print plate", Mr Dehrmann says, "then have it duplicated. The prints seem to have delivered the author's aura to the autograph seeker quite successfully." One solicitous correspondent after another around 1830 received this "hand-written" verse:

Was ist denn aber bey'm Gespräch

Was Herz und Geist erfüllet?

Als dass ein ächtes Wort-Gepräg

Von Aug zu Auge quillet.

Which our O-level German translates as, "What is it in a conversation that replenishes both heart and mind, but this: that genuine words do flow from eye to eye". Underneath was Goethe's (etched) signature. As Mr Dehrmann says, the lines praise "genuine" words and the fulfilment of conversation. "Goethe's lithograph is therefore twice removed from the authenticity it invokes. I would suspect that this irony was not lost on him."

Robert De Niro's scripts, correspondence, costumes, etc, have been acquired by the Harry Ransom Center in Texas, "one of the most exciting and significant new film acquisitions in recent years". According to R. Colin Tait, writing in *Ransom Edition*, the Center's journal, De Niro's acting method "is a comprehensive enterprise, beginning immediately after he is cast and often going on for months before the film shoots. This was certainly the case with *Raging Bull*". The above make-up stills offer a glimpse of De Niro in the process of becoming Jake La Motta.



The works of James Joyce were released from copyright in 2012. The year began with a squabble between the Zurich James Joyce Foundation and Ithys Press of Dublin. The latter took advantage of the end of copyright restriction to publish a letter from Joyce to his grandson Stephen, dated September 5, 1936. It appeared as an illustrated book, under the title *The Cats of Copenhagen* (see NB, February 17, 2012). The proprietor of Ithys Press saw in it a "keen, almost anarchic subtext". We saw it as a charming scribble to a little boy, such as many a grandpa has written. Some felt that it would have been courteous on the part of the publishers to have notified the Joyce Foundation of their intentions in advance, but the time of copyright protection had passed and, like it or not, *The Cats of Copenhagen* exists. Critics and readers are entitled to ask whether it is worthy of its status as a new addition to Joyce's bibliography – in effect, the first since the *Letters* were published in the mid-1960s. It opens like this:

My dear nipotino, Alas! I cannot find you a Copenhagen cat because there are no cats in Copenhagen. There are lots and lots of fish and bicycles but there are no cats. Also there are no policemen. All the Danish policemen pass the day at home in bed . . . . There are lots and lots of young boys dressed in red on bicycles going around all day with telegrams and letters and post-cards. These are all for the policemen from old ladies who want to cross the road and boys who are writing home for more sweets and girls who want to know something about the moon . . . . A Joycean might feel that if Joyce had intended to write a children's book, he would have applied himself to the task. A letter is a letter; even when the author is James Joyce. Another view is that something delightful, tripping off the pen of a great writer, deserves the light of day. *The Cats of Copenhagen*, with illustrations by Casey Sorrow, has now been issued by Simon and Schuster (\$16.99), who say, "it is a joy to see this exquisite story in print at last".

J. C.

**LONDON BRIDGE IN PLAGUE AND FIRE**  
A Novel  
DAVID MADDEN

Available in September

**London Bridge in Plague and Fire**  
A Novel by David Madden

Hardcover, 352 pages, £23.95 / Available in the UK and Europe from Eurospan  
www.eurospanbookstore.com/tennessee / Tel +44 (0) 1767 604972

Also visit [davidmadden.net](http://davidmadden.net) or [utpress.org/londonbridge](http://utpress.org/londonbridge) for more information.

"The spellbinding story of the life and times of a world icon. Distinguish yourself and buy it now!"  
—Winston Groom, historian and author of *Forrest Gump*

"A brilliant cleaving of historical fact and Blakeian imagination. David Madden has written his masterpiece."  
—Ron Rash, author of *Serena*

"Lyrical and daring. David Madden brings the evolving bridge and its inhabitants to glowing, memorable life."  
—Hilma Wolitzer, author of *An Available Man*

"An explosively brilliant story of London Bridge and its fascinating array of characters. This is a winner! Bravo!"  
—Clarence Major, Novelist, Poet, Painter

© The Times Literary Supplement Limited, 2013. Published and licensed for distribution in electronic and all other derivative forms by The Times Literary Supplement Limited, 3 Thomas More Square, London E9H 1BS, England. Telephone: 020-7782 5000 Fax: 020-7782 4966 E-mail: [letters@tlsc.co.uk](mailto:letters@tlsc.co.uk) without whose express permission no part may be reproduced. UK copy printed by Newsprinters (Knowsley) Limited, Killing Road, Prescot, Merseyside, L34 9HN, England. US copy printed by Stellar Printing Inc, 38-38 9th Street, Long Island City, NY 11101. EUROPEAN PRICES: Belgium €2.50, France €3.50, Germany €4.50, Greece €4.20, Italy €4.00, Netherlands €4.20, Portugal €3.50, Spain €3.50, CANADA: \$5.75, ROW: Denmark DKR30, Iceland IRR25, India INR400, Israel NIS34, Kuwait KWS1.25, Malta MTL2.10, New Zealand NZ\$7, Norway NKR35, Singapore S\$56, UAE A\$512. TLS subscription rates (12 months/52 issues): UK £115, Europe £140, USA \$169, Canada (air freight) \$225, Rest of World (Airmail) £165. Please send cheque or credit card details to: TLS Subscriptions, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, LE37 4JJ, UK. Telephone 01828 438781. For US and Canada please send to: TLS Subscriptions, P.O. Box 3000, Denver, CO 80202, USA. Telephone 1-800 370 9640 (new subscriptions only) and 1-800 783 4905 (general enquiries).

