

THE LEXICON OF THIEVES CANT

(1st Edition)

Compiled by Shaun Hately

This dictionary is based on the "Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue. A Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit and Pickpocket Eloquence." Printed for C. Chappel of Pall-Mall, London in 1811, and based on the dictionary compiled by Captain Grose in 1785. Despite its date of publication, it can be used in FRP campaigns by those who desire a detailed use of thieves cant. A reproduction of this dictionary was published in 1981 by Papermac, a division of MacMillan Publishers Limited, London and Basingstoke and is (C) 1971 Digest Books Inc. Illinois. "The Lexicon of Thieves Cant (1st Edition): Compiled by Shaun Hately." is (C) 1996 Shaun Hately, except where copyright is owned by other people. No challenge is made by Shaun Hately to any copyright status held by other people. Permission to copy this dictionary in unedited form including this section is granted by Shaun Hately, provided no profit is made.

This guide is not recommended for use by children in their games as some of the material is of an adult nature.

I apologise for the possibility that some of the material in this dictionary may be construed as racist, sexist or homophobic. This material is included for the sake of completeness. I do not subscribe to prejudice in any way shape or form. I would also like to say that the use of the term 'gipsy' does not refer to groups of people who wander from place to place, but only to those people who engage in criminal activity while maintaining such a lifestyle.

I welcome contributions to further editions of this dictionary. Any contributions will be acknowledged.

My e-mail address is:

drednort@bud.swin.edu.au

My snail mail address is:

Mr Shaun Hately
45 Moreton St
Frankston North
Victoria 3200
AUSTRALIA

CANT TO ENGLISH

-A-

Abness:	the mistress of a brothel.
Abram:	naked
Abram cove:	a word used among thieves which signifies a naked or poor man. It can also mean a lusty strong rogue.
Abram men:	a beggar who pretends to be mad.
To sham abram:	to pretend to be sick.
Academy:	brothel.
Ace of spades:	a widow.
Acorn:	to ride a horse foaled by an acorn, is to be hanged on the gallows.
Adam Tiler:	a pickpockets associate, who receives the stolen goods, and runs off with them.
Affidavit Men:	a witness for hire. Someone who will swear to anything in

court if paid to do so.

Air and exercise: He has had air and exercise, ie he has been whipped at the carts tail.

Ambidexter: a lawyer who garners fees from both plaintiff and defender.

To amuse: to fling dust into the eyes of the person intended to be robbed; also to invent some plausible tale to delude a shopkeeper in order to put them off their guard.

Amusers: a rogue who uses the above tactic.

Anabaptist: a pickpocket caught in the act, and punished by being thrown into a pond.

Anglers: pilferers or petty thieves who with a stick having a hook at the end, steal goods out of shop windows, grates etc. Also someone who 'draws in' victims in order to rob them.

Angling for coppers: begging out of a prison window with a cap or box let down on the end of a long string.

Arch Rogue: The chief of a gang of thieves or gipsies.

Ard: hot, stolen.

Ark: a boat.

Ark ruffians: rogues who in conjunction with watermen, robbed and sometimes murdered on the water by picking a quarrel with passengers in a boat, boarding it, plundering, stripping, and throwing them overboard.

Artichoke: hanged (see hearty choke).

Aunt: a prostitute or someone who procures prostitutes.

Avoir Du Pois Lay: stealing brass weights off the counters of shops.

Autem Bawler: a priest.

Autem Divers: pickpockets who operate in churches and temples.

Autem Mort: a female beggar who hires children in order to inspire charity.

-B-

Babes in the wood: criminals in the stocks or pillory.

Badge: a term for one who has had his hand burned as punishment for theft.

Bandog: a bailiff or sheriff.

Barrow man: a man under sentence of transport.

Bat: a very common prostitute.

Bawd: a prostitute.

Bawdy basket: criminal who sells items from door to door, but makes most of their living by stealing.

Beak: a justice of the peace or magistrate.

Beef: to "cry beef" is to give an alarm. To "be in a mans beef" is to wound him with a sword.

Beggar maker: a man who owns a tavern.

Beilby's Ball: to "dance with Beilby's ball" is to be hung.

Bene: good.

Bene Bowse: good beer.

Bene Cove: good fellow.

Bene Darkmans: good night.

Bene feaker: counterfeiter.

Bene feakers of gybes: counterfeiter of false passes.

Ben: a fool.

Bess or Betty: a crow bar.

Bilboes: the stocks or prison.

Bilk: to cheat or con.

Bing: to go or escape.

Bingo: brandy or other spirit.

Bingo boy: a drinker of brandy.

Bingo mort: a female drinker of brandy.
 Birds of a feather: rogues of the same gang.
 Bite: to steal.
 Black art: the art of picking a lot.
 Black box: a lawyer.
 Blasted fellow: an abandoned rogue or prostitute.
 Blater: a stolen calf.
 Bleaters: those cheated by a Jack in the Box (See Jack in the box).
 Bleating rig: sheep stealing.
 Blow: to "bite the blow" is to steal the goods.
 Blue pigeons: thieves who steal lead off houses and other buildings.
 Bluffer: an inn keeper.
 Blunt: money.
 Boarding school: a prison.
 Bob: shoplifter's assistant. One who receives stolen goods.
 Boned: seized, arrested.
 Bounge: a purse.
 Bounge nipper: a cut purse.
 Brimstone: an abandoned woman or thief.
 Bubber: a thief who steals from taverns.
 Bufe: a dog.
 Bufe nabber: a dog thief.
 Bug: to exchange a material for one of less value.
 Bunge nipper: a pickpocket.
 Burning the ken: to flee a tavern without paying your bill.
 Bus napper: a constable.
 Bus nappers kenchin: a watchman.
 Buttock and file: a prostitute who steals from their clients.
 Button: a fake coin.
 Buzman: a pickpocket.

-C-

Cackle: to inform on a thief.
 Calle: a cloak or gown worn as a disguise.
 Canters: thieves or beggars.
 Canting Crew: thieves or beggars.
 Cap: take an oath.
 Captain Sharp: a person in a fixed game of chance whose job is to bully those who refuse to pay their debts.
 Caravan: a large sum of money, or one who is cheated of a large sum of money.
 Cattle: prostitutes or gipsies.
 Charactered: to have your hand burnt as a punishment for theft.
 Charm: a lockpick.
 Chatts: the gallows.
 Clank: a silver tankard.
 Clank napper: a silver tankard stealer.
 Clear: very drunk.
 Click: to hit.
 Clicker: the person who divides the booty between a group of thieves.
 Climb up a ladder to bed: be hanged.
 Cloy: steal.
 Cloyes: thieves.
 Cly: a pocket.
 Cly the jerk: to be whipped.
 Cockles, to cry: to be hanged.
 Colt: one who lends a horse to a highway man, or an apprentice

thief.
Confect: counterfeited.
Content: a person murdered for resisting a robbery.
Cove: a man.
Cracksman: a house breaker.
Cramp word: the sentence of death.
Crash: kill.
Crop: hang.
Cull: an honest man.
Cullability: easily cheated.
Curbing law: the act off hooking items out of a window (see angling.)
Cursitors: a bad lawyer

-D-

Dangle: hang.
Darbies: chains (handcuffs)
Darby: easy money.
Darkee: a dark or hooded lantern.
Darkmans: night time.
Dawb: bribe.
Deadly nevergreen: gallows.
Derrick: a hangman.
Dimber Damber: a chief thief.
Ding Boy: a mugger.
Dive: to pick a pocket.
Dive: a thieves hideout.
Dommerer: a beggar who pretends to be mute.
Drag: to follow a cart or wagon in order to rob it.
Draw-latches: robbers of houses.
Drawing the King's picture: to counterfeit coins.
Dromedary: a bungling thief.
Dub: a lockpick.
Dub Lay: to rob a house by picking its lock.
Dumme: a pocket book or purse.
Dumps: coins made of lead.
Die hard: show no fear or remorse at the gallows.

-E-

Earnest: a promise to pay.
Equipt: well dressed, rich.

-F-

Fagger: a small boy passed through a window in order to open the door to a house.
Family man: a receiver of stolen goods.
Fam lay: palming an item in order to steal it.
Fams: gloves.
Fen: a prostitute.
Fence: to sell stolen goods. One who buys stolen goods.
Fencing ken: a place where stolen goods are hidden.
Fidlam ben: thieves.
Figging law: the art of picking pockets.
Figure dancer: one who alters the numbers on notes of credit or other paper money.
Filcher: see angler.
Flash ken: a thieves hideout.

Flash lingo: thieves cant.
Floating hell: a prison ship.
Flog: to whip.
Fob: cheat.
Footpad: a common thief.
Fork: to pick a pocket.
Fortune teller: a judge.
Foyst: a pickpocket.
Frummagemmed: strangled or hanged.
Fun: a cheat or a trick.
Fuzz: to pretend to shuffle a deck of cards.

-G-

Gallows bird: a thief or pickpocket or someone that associates with them.
Game: any mode of robbery.
Gamon: to deceive.
Gaoler's coach: a cart used to take felons to execution.
Gentleman's master: a highwayman.
Gibberish: thieves cant.
Gilt: a thief who picks locks.
Ginny: a crowbar.
Glazier: a thief who breaks windows in order to steal.
Glim: a lantern used in housebreaking.
Grease: bribe.
Gregorian tree: gallows.
Gudgeon: a gullible person.
Gull: a gullible person, to cheat someone.

-H-

Hamlet: a senior constable.
Hang gallows look: a villainous appearance.
Hang in chains: a vile, desperate person.
Harman: a constable.
Harmans: the stocks.
Hearty choke: to be hanged.
Heave: to rob.
Hempen fever: a person who has been hanged is said to have died of "hempen fever."
Hempen widow: one whose husband was hanged.
High pad: a highwayman.
Hike: to run away.
Hoist: to rob by entering through windows that have been left open.
Hoodwink: blindfold or fool someone.
Hooked: captured.
Hookers: see angler.
Hubbub: a riot.
Hue: to whip.
Hush: murder.
Hush money: a bribe.

-I-

Iron: money.
Ironmongers shop: to "keep an ironmongers shop" is to be hung in chains.

-J-

Jack in a box: a card sharper.
Jack Ketch: hangman.
Jail bird: prisoner.
Jammed: hanged.
Jem: a gold ring.
Jemmy: a crow bar.
Jigger: whipping post.
Jordain: a stick or staff used by muggers.
Juggler's box: the device used to burn the hands of criminals.
Jukrum: the permission of the head of a thieves guild to operate within his territory.

-K-

Kate: a lockpick.
Ken: a house.
Ken Miller or Ken
Cracker: housebreaker.
Ketch: hangman.
Kiddeys: young thieves.
King's plate: chains, shackles.
King's pictures: money.
Knight of the blade: a bully.
Knight of the post: a man willing to give fake evidence for money.
Knight of the road: a highwayman.

-L-

Laced mutton: a prostitute.
Lag: a man transported for a crime.
Land pirate: a highwayman.
Lay: danger.
Leaf: to "go with the fall of the leaf" is to be hanged.
Lift: steal.
Lightmans: daytime.
Little snakesman: a small boy passed through a window in order to open a door.
Long tongued: unable to keep a secret.
Lowre: money.
Lully priggers: thieves who steal wet clothes off clothes lines.
Lurch: to be "left in the lurch" is to be betrayed by ones companions.

-M-

Mad Tom: a beggar who feigns madness.
Made: stolen.
Made man: a member of the thieves guild.
Maunding: begging.
Milch cow: one who is easily tricked out of his money.
Moabites: bailiffs.
Mobility: the commoners. Intended as a pun on 'nobility.'
Moon curser: a thief who uses the darkness as cover for his crime.
Moon men: gypsies.
Morning drop: the gallows.
Mort: a woman.
Moss: lead stolen off the top of buildings.
Mot: see Mort.
Myrmidons: constables.

-N-

Nab: to seize.
Nab the stoop: to be put in the stocks.
Napper: a cheat or thief.
Napper of naps: a sheep stealer.
Natty lads: young thieves or pickpockets.
Neck weed: hemp to be made into rope.
Needle point: a card sharper.
New drop: the gallows.
Newman's lift: the gallows.
Nig: the metal clipped of a coin by a criminal.
Night magistrate: a constable.
Nim: to steal or pilfer.
Nip: a cheat.
Noisy dog racket: the crime of stealing brass door knockers from doors.
Noozed: hanged (or married).
Nose: a criminal who gives evidence against his colleagues in order to gain a lighter sentence.
Nubbing: hanging.
Nubbing cheat: the gallows.
Nubbing cove: the hangman.
Nubbing ken: the courthouse.
Nypper: a cutpurse.

-O-

Oak: a rich man.
Oaken towel: a cudgel.
Office: to "give office" is to tell constables of a thieves activities.
Old hand: an experienced thief.
Onion: a seal or signet ring.
Overseer: a man in the pillory or stocks.

-P-

Pad: the highway.
Pad borrowers: horse thieves.
Palaver: a tale told in order avoid blame for a crime.
Panny: house.
Parenthesis: the stocks.
Parings: the metal clipped of a coin by a criminal.
Patter flash: to use thieves cant.
Paum: conceal in the hand.
Peach: turn informer.
Peeper: a spying glass. (Telescope?)
Penance board: the pillory.
Petty fogger: a lawyer willing to undertake any case.
Pig: an officer of the law.
Pigeon: a person easy to cheat.
Plate: money, silver, gold etc.
Poney: money.
Pop: pawn.
Pop shop: pawnbrokers.
Porridge: prison.
Posse mobilitatis: a mob chasing a criminal.
Poulterer: a man who opens mail and steals the money enclosed within.
Pound: prison.

Prad lay: the act of cutting the saddlebags of horses in order to steal their contents.
 Prad: a horse.
 Prig: a thief.
 Prig napper: one who catches thieves. A bounty hunter.
 Priggers: thieves
 Priggers of horse thieves.
 prancers:
 Priggers of robbers of henhouses.
 cacklers:
 Prince Prig: head of a group of thieves or gipsies.
 Provondor: the victim of a thief.
 Public ledger: a prostitute.
 Pull: arrest.
 Puzzle-cause: a lawyer who does not understand the case.

-Q-

Quarromes: a body.
 Queer: "To queer" means to confuse someone.
 Queer bail: someone who pretends to have money in order to act as surety for an arrested person. When the person is released they disappear.
 Queer birds: a person who when released from prison returns to a life of crime.
 Queer bit makers: counterfeiters of coins.
 Queer bung: an empty purse.
 Queer cove: a thief.
 Queer cuffin: a justice of the peace.
 Queer ken: a prison.
 Queer mort: a diseased prostitute.
 Quod: prison.
 Quota: a thieves share of the booty.

-R-

Rag: paper money.
 Rank rider: a highwayman.
 Rap: taking a false oath.
 Rascal: rogue or villain.
 Rat: an informer. To turn informer.
 Rattling cove: a coachman.
 Rattling mumpers: beggars who beg from coaches.
 Reader: a pocket book or purse.
 Reader merchants: pickpockets.
 Ready: money.
 Recruiting service: highway robbery.
 Repository: a gaol.
 Resurrection men: those employed by scientists to steal bodies from churchyards.
 Rhino: money.
 Ribbin: money.
 Ringing the changes: exchanging silver coins for those made of less valuable metal.
 Roast: arrest.
 Robert's men: successful thieves.
 Rot gut: cheap spiritous liquor.
 Rovers: pirates, wandering thieves.
 Rub: run away.
 Ruffles: chains or shackles.

Rufflers: beggars who pretend to be wounded soldiers or sailors.
 Rug: safe and secure.
 Rum: fine, good, valuable.
 Rum beck: a justice of the peace.
 Rum bite: a clever trick.
 Rum bob: a skilled apprentice thief.
 Rum bung: a full purse.
 Rum cod: a purse filled with gold.
 Rum diver: a skilled pickpocket.
 Rum dubber: a skilled lock picker.
 Rum file: a skilled pickpocket.
 Rum fun: a clever trick.
 Rum pad: the highway.
 Rum padders: skilled and successful highwaymen.
 Rum prancer: a good horse.
 Rushers: home invaders.

-S-

Salmon: an oath taken by a beggar.
 Scapegallows: one who deserves and has escaped the gallows.
 Scragged: hanged.
 Scragg'em fair: a public execution.
 Screw: a lock pick or skeleton key.
 Sham: a trick.
 Sharper: a con man.
 Sheriff's
 journeyman: hangman.
 Sheriff's ball: an execution.
 Sheriff's hotel: prison.
 Sheriff's picture
 frame: gallows.
 Shop: prison.
 Shoplifter: one who steals from a shop.
 Sing: call out, inform.
 Slang: chains or shackles.
 Slang: thieves cant.
 Slipgibbet: see Scapegallows.
 Snap the glaze: break a window.
 Snapt: captured.
 Sneak: a pilferer.
 Snoozing ken: brothel.
 Sop: a bribe.
 Spring-ankle
 warehouse: prison.
 Squeak: escape. "To squeak" means to confess.
 Squeakers: organ pipes.
 Stalling ken: place where stolen goods can be sold.
 Star the glaze: break a jewellers window.
 Stoop: the pillory.
 Stop hole abbey: the central hideout or guild hall for a thieves guild.
 Stretching: hanging.
 Stuling ken: see Stalling ken.
 Swaddler: a thief who beats and murders his victims.
 Swag: booty.
 Sweating: removing metal from a coin, by using chemicals.
 Swing: hang.

-T-

Tail: a prostitute.
 Tayle drawers: a thief who steals swords from a mans belt.
 Teize: a flogging.
 Thatch-gallows: a man of poor character.
 Thief takers: someone who associates with thieves in order to arrest them and obtain rewards.
 Three-legged mare: the gallows.
 Three legged stool: the gallows.
 Tom of Bedlam: see Mad Tom.
 Topping cheat: the gallows.
 Topping cove: hangman.
 Touch: arrest.
 Trounce: punish.
 Tucked up: hanged.
 Turncoat: one who has betrayed his friends.
 Turn off: hang.
 Twig: realise that something is up.
 Two to one shop: pawnbrokers.

-U-

Underdubber: a prison guard.
 Upright Man: chief thief of a guild.
 Used up: killed.

-V-

Vamp: pawn.
 Varlets: criminals.
 Vincent's law: the art of cheating at cards.
 Vowel: to write an I.O.U.

-W-

Waterpad: river pirate.
 Wedge: silver plate.
 Whack: a share of booty obtained by fraud.
 Whip jacks: thieves who pretend to be sailors in order to gain free passage on boats and ships.
 Wiper: handkerchief.
 Wiper drawer: a pickpocket who steals handkerchiefs.
 Wooden ruff: pillory.
 Wry neck day: day of execution.

-Y-

Yelp: cry out for the police.

-Z-

Zad: a very crooked person.

ENGLISH TO CANT

-A-

Abandoned person: blasted fellow, brimstone, lurch
 Arrested: boned, hooked, nabbed, pulled, roasted, snapt, touched

-B-

Beer: bowse
Beggars: abram men, autem mort, dommerer, mad Tom, rattling mumpers, rufflers, Tom of Bedlam
Begging: angling for coppers, maunding
Boat: ark
Body: quarromes
Body thieves: ressurection men
Booty: quota, swag, whack
Brandy: bingo
Bribe: dawb, grease, hush money, sop
Brothel: academy, snoozing ken

-C-

Calf, stolen: blater
Call for police: cry beef
Cart: gaoler's coach
Cloak: calle
Club: jordain, oaken towel
Coach man: rattling cove
Coin, fake: button, dump
Coin shavings: nig, parings
Con: amuse, bilk, fob, fun, fuzz, hoodwink, sham
Con man: amuser, jack in a box, needle point, nip, sharper
Counterfeiter: bene feaker, figure dancer, queer bit maker
Counterfeited: confect
Counterfeiting: drawing the King's picture, sweating
Courthouse: nubbing ken
Criminals being punished:
Being transported: barrow man, lag
In stocks: babes in the wood, nappered, overseer
With hands burned: badge, characterized
Crow bar: Bess, Betty, ginny, jemmy

-D-

Danger: lay
Day: lightmans
Death sentence: cramp word
Dog: bufe
Drunk: clear

-E-

Escape: bing, burning the ken, hike, rub

-F-

Feign illness: sham abram
Follow: drag
Fool: Ben, cullability, gudgeon, gull, milch cow, pigeon, queer

-G-

Gallows: chatts, deadly nevergreen, Gregorian Tree, morning drop, new drop, Newman's lift, nubbing cheat, sheriff's picture frame, three legged mare, three legged stool, topping cheat

Gang: birds of a feather
Gipsies: cattle, moon men
Gloves: fams
Good: bene, rum

-H-

Hanged: acorn, artichoked, beilby's ball, cry cockles, cropped,
dangled, frummagemmed, hearty choked, hempen fever,
ironmongers shop, jammed, leaf, noozed, nubbing, scragged,
stretched, swing
Hangman: Derrick, Jack Ketch, Ketch, nubbing cove, sheriff's
journeyman, topping cove, turned off
Hideout: dive, fencing ken, flash ken, stalling ken, stop hole
abbey, stuling ken
Highway: pad
Highwayman: colt, gentleman's master, high pad, knight of the road,
land pirate, rank rider
Highway robbery: recruiting service
Hit: click
Honest man: cull
House: ken, panny
Housebreaker: cracksman, draw latch, Ken Miller, Ken Cracker,
rushers

-I-

Inform: cackle, long tongued, nose, office, peach, rat, sing

-J-

Judge etc: beak, fortune teller, queer cuffin

-K-

Kill: crash, use up

-L-

Lantern: darkee, glim
Lawyer: black box, cursitor, petty fogger, puzzle-case
Lead: moss
License: jukrum
Lie: amuse, gamon, palaver
Lock pick: charm, dub, kate, screw
Lock picker: gilt
Lock picking: black art, dub lay

-M-

Man: cove
Mistress of brothel: abbess, aunt
Money: caravan, iron, King's pictures, lowre, plate, poney, rag,
ready, rhino, ribbin, wedge
Mugger: ding boy
Murder: hush

-N-

Naked: abram

Night: darkmans

-O-

Oath: cap, earnest, rap (false), salmon

-P-

Palming: fam lay, pauming
Pawn: pop, vamp
Pawnbrokers: pop shop, two to one shop
Pickpocket: Adam Tiler, anabaptist, autem divers, bung nipper, buzman, foyst, natty lad, nypper, reader merchants
Picking pockets: dive, figging law, forking
Pocket: cly
Police officer: bandog, bus napper, bus napper kenchin, hamlet, harman, moabites, myrmidons, night magistrate, pig
Priest: autem bawler
Prison: Bilboes, boarding school, porridge, pound, queer ken, quod, repository, sheriff's hotel, shop, spring-ankle warehouse
Prison ship: floating hell
Prisoner: jail bird, queer birds
Prostitute: aunt, bat, bawd, buttock and file, cattle, fen, laced mutton, public ledger, queer mort, tail
Purse: boung, dumme, reader
Purse, cut: boung nipper

-R-

Receiver of stolen goods: family man, fence
Rich: equipt, oak
Ring: jem, onion
Riot: hubbub

-S-

Secure: rug
Shackles: darbies, King's plate, ruffles, slang
Sheep stealing: bleating rig
Shoplifter: Bob
Staff: jordain
Steal: bite, bite the blow, cloy, curbing law, heave, hoist, lift, nim, prad lay
Stocks: Bilboes, parenthesis, penance board, wooden ruff
Stolen: ard, made
Swap: bug, ring the changes

-T-

Tavern owner: beggar maker
Theft: game
Thief: Adam Tiler, anabaptist, anglers, ark ruffians, autem divers, bawdy basket, blue pigeons, Bob, bubber, bufe napper, bung nipper, buzman, canters, canting crew, Captain Sharp, clank napper, cloyes, cracksman, draw latches, dromedary, fagger, fidlam ben, filcher, footpad, foyst, gallows bird, gilt, glazier, hooker, kiddeys, little snakesman, lully priggers, made man, moon curser,

napper of naps, natty lads, nypper, old hand, pad
borrowers, poulterer, priggers, priggers of prancers,
priggers of cacklers, queer cove, reader merchant,
ressurrection men, Robert's men, rovers, shoplifter, sneak,
swaddler, tayle drawer, waterpad, whip jack
Thief, head: Arch Rogue, Dimber Damber, Prince Prig, Upright Man
Thieves cant: flash lingo, gibberish, patter flash, slang

-V-

Victim: content, provendor

-W-

Whipping: air and exercise, cly the jerk, flogging, hue, teize
Whipping post: jigger
Widow: ace of spades, hempen widow (if husband was hanged)
Witness, fake: affidavit man, knight of the post
Woman: mort, mot
Wound: beef