

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.

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AUSTRALI

CANT TO ENGLISH

-A-

Abbess:
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
aquarrel 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	Bess or Betty: a crow bar	Blue pigeons: thieves who steal lead off houses and other buildings
Bawd: a prostitute	Bilboes: the stocks or prison	Bluffer: an inn keeper
Bawdy basket: criminal who sells items from door to door, but makes most of their living by stealing	Bilk: to cheat or con	Blunt: money
Beak: a justice of the peace or magistrate	Bing: to go or escape	Boarding school: a prison
Beef: to "cry beef" is to give an alarm To "be in a mans beef" is to wound him with a sword	Bingo: brandy or other spirit	Bob: shoplifter's assistant One who receives stolen goods
Beggar maker: a man who owns a tavern	Bingo boy: a drinker of brandy	Boned: seized, arrested
Beilby's Ball: to "dance with Beilby's ball" is to be hung	Bingo mort: a female drinker of brandy	Boung: a purse
Bene: good	Birds of a feather: rogues of the same gang	Boung nipper: a cut purse
Bene Bowse: good beer	Bite: to steal	Brimstone: an abandoned woman or thief
Bene Cove: good fellow	Black art: the art of picking a lot	Bubber: a thief who steals from taverns
Bene Darkmans: good night	Black box: a lawyer	Bufe: a dog
Bene feaker: counterfeiter	Blasted fellow: an abandoned rogue or prostitute	Bufe nabber: a dog thief
Bene feakers of gybes: counterfeiter of false passes	Blater: a stolen calf	Bug: to exchange a material for one of less value
Ben: a fool	Bleaters: those cheated by a Jack in the Box (See Jack in the box)	Bung nipper: a pickpocket
	Bleating rig: sheep stealing	Burning the ken: to flee a tavern without paying your bill

Bus napper: a constable	to have your hand burnt as a punishment for theft	Content: a person murdered for resisting a robbery
Bus nappers kenchin: a watchman	Charm: a lockpick	Cove: a man
Buttock and file: a prostitute who steals from their clients	Chatts: the gallows	Cracksman: a house breaker
Button: a fake coin	Clank: a silver tankard	Cramp word: the sentence of death
Buzman: a pickpocket	Clank napper: a silver tankard stealer	Crash: kill
-C-	Clear: very drunk	Crop: hang
Cackle: to inform on a thief	Click: to hit	Cull: an honest man
Calle: a cloak or gown worn as a disguise	Clicker: the person who divides the booty between a group of thieves	Cullability: easily cheated
Canters: thieves or beggars	Climb up a ladder to bed: be hanged	Curbing law: the act off hooking items out of a window (see angling)
Canting Crew: thieves or beggars	Cloy: steal	Cursitors: a bad lawyer
Cap take an oath	Cloyes: thieves	
Captain Sharp: a person in a fixed game of chance whose job is to bully those who refuse to pay their debts	Cly: a pocket	-D-
Caravan: a large sum of money, or one who is cheated of a large sum of money	Cly the jerk: to be whipped	Dangle: hang
Cattle: prostitutes or gipsies	Cockles, to cry: to be hanged	Darbies: chains (handcuffs)
Charactered:	Colt: one who lends a horse to a highway man, or an apprentice thief	Darby: easy money
	Confect: counterfeited	Darkee: a dark or hooded lantern
		Darkmans:

night time	coins made of lead	a place where stolen goods are hidden
Dawb: bribe	Die hard: show no fear or remorse at the gallows	Fidlam ben: thieves
Deadly nevergreen: gallows		Figging law: the art of picking pockets
Derrick: a hangman		Figure dancer: one who alters the numbers on notes of credit or other paper money
Dimber Damber: a chief thief	-E-	Filcher: see angler
Ding Boy: a mugger	Earnest: a promise to pay	Flash ken: a thieves hideout
Dive: to pick a pocket	Equipt: well dressed, rich	Flash lingo: thieves cant
Dive: a thieves hideout		Floating hell: a prison ship
Dommerer: a beggar who pretends to be mute	-F-	Flog: to whip
Drag: to follow a cart or wagon in order to rob it	Fagger: a small boy passed through a window in order to open the door to a house	Fob: cheat
Draw-latches: robbers of houses		Footpad: a common thief
Drawing the King's picture: to counterfeit coins	Family man: a receiver of stolen goods	Fork: to pick a pocket
Dromedary: a bungling thief	Fam lay: palming an item in order to steal it	Fortune teller: a judge
Dub: a lockpick	Fams: gloves	Foyst: a pickpocket
Dub Lay: to rob a house by picking its lock	Fen: a prostitute	Frummagemmed: strangled or hanged
Dummee: a pocket book or purse	Fence: to sell stolen goods One who buys stolen goods	Fun: a cheat or a trick
Dumps:	Fencing ken:	Fuzz:

to pretend to shuffle a deck of cards

Gudgeon:
a gullible person

to rob by entering through windows that have been left open

Gull:
a gullible person, to cheat someone

Hoodwink:
blindfold or fool someone

-G-

Gallows bird:
a thief or pickpocket or someone that associates with them

-H-

Hooked:
captured

Game:
any mode of robbery

Hamlet:
a senior constable

Hookers:
see angler

Gamon:
to deceive

Hang gallows look:
a villainous appearance

Hubbub:
a riot

Gaoler's coach:
a cart used to take felons to execution

Hang in chains:
a vile, desperate person

Hue:
to whip

Gentleman's master:
a highwayman

Harman:
a constable

Hush:
murder

Gibberish:
thieves cant

Harmans:
the stocks

Hush money:
a bribe

Gilt:
a thief who picks locks

Hearty choke:
to be hanged

-I-

Ginny:
a crowbar

Heave:
to rob

Iron:
money

Glazier:
a thief who breaks windows in order to steal

Hempen fever:
a person who has been hanged is said to have died of "hempen fever"

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

Glim:
a lantern used in housebreaking

Hempen widow:
one whose husband was hanged

Grease:
bribe

High pad:
a highwayman

-J-

Gregorian tree:
gallows

Hike:
to run away

Jack in a box:
a card sharper

Hoist:

Jack Ketch: hangman	young thieves	a small boy passed through a window in order to open a door
Jail bird: prisoner	King's plate: chains, shackles	Long tongued: unable to keep a secret
Jammed: hanged	King's pictures: money	Lowre: money
Jem: a gold ring	Knight of the blade: a bully	Lully priggers: thieves who steal wet clothes off clothes lines
Jemmy: a crow bar	Knight of the post: a man willing to give fake evidence for money	Lurch: to be "left in the lurch" is to be betrayed by ones companions
Jigger: whipping post	Knight of the road: a highwayman	
Jordain: a stick or staff used by muggers		
Juggler's box: the device used to burn the hands of criminals	-L-	-M-
Jukrum: the permission of the head of a thieves guild to operate within his territory	Laced mutton: a prostitute	Mad Tom: a beggar who feigns madness
	Lag: a man transported for a crime	Made: stolen
	Land pirate: a highwayman	Made man: a member of the thieves guild
-K-	Lay: danger	Maunding: begging
Kate: a lockpick	Leaf: to "go with the fall of the leaf" is to be hanged	Milch cow: one who is easily tricked out of his money
Ken: a house	Lift: steal	Moabites: bailiffs
Ken Miller or Ken Cracker: housebreaker	Lightmans: daytime	Mobility: the commoners Intended as a pun on `nobility'
Ketch: hangman	Little snakesman:	
Kiddeys:		

Moon curser:
a thief who uses the
darkness as cover for his
crime

Moon men:
gipsies

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 prancers:
horse thieves

Priggers of cacklers:
robbers of henhouses

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

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

Rag: paper money	exchanging silver coins for those made of less valuable metal	a skilled lock picker
Rank rider: a highwayman	Roast: arrest	Rum file: a skilled pickpocket
Rap: taking a false oath	Robert's men: successful thieves	Rum fun: a clever trick
Rascal: rogue or villain	Rot gut: cheap spiritous liquor	Rum pad: the highway
Rat: an informer To turn informer	Rovers: pirates, wandering thieves	Rum padders: skilled and successful highwaymen
Rattling cove: a coachman	Rub: run away	Rum prancer: a good horse
Rattling mumpers: beggars who beg from coaches	Ruffles: chains or shackles	Rushers: home invaders
Reader: a pocket book or purse	Rufflers: beggars who pretend to be wounded soldiers or sailors	
Reader merchants: pickpockets	Rug: safe and secure	-S-
Ready: money	Rum: fine, good, valuable	Salmon: an oath taken by a beggar
Recruiting service: highway robbery	Rum beck: a justice of the peace	Scapegallows: one who deserves and has escaped the gallows
Repository: a gaol	Rum bite: a clever trick	Scragged: hanged
Resurrection men: those employed by scientists to steal bodies from churchyards	Rum bob: a skilled apprentice thief	Scragg'em fair: a public execution
Rhino: money	Rum bung: a full purse	Screw: a lock pick or skeleton key
Ribbin: money	Rum cod: a purse filled with gold	Sham: a trick
Ringing the changes:	Rum diver: a skilled pickpocket	Sharper: a con man
	Rum dubber:	Sheriff's journeyman:

hangman	escape "To squeak" means to confess	Tayle drawers: a thief who steals swords from a mans belt
Sheriff's ball: an execution	Squeakers: organ pipes	Teize: a flogging
Sheriff's hotel: prison	Stalling ken: place where stolen goods can be sold	Thatch-gallows: a man of poor character
Sheriff's picture frame: gallows	Star the glaze: break a jewellers window	Thief takers: someone who associates with thieves in order to arrest them and obtain rewards
Shop: prison	Stoop: the pillory	Three-legged mare: the gallows
Shoplifter: one who steals from a shop	Stop hole abbey: the central hideout or guild hall for a thieves guild	Three legged stool: the gallows
Sing: call out, inform	Stretching: hanging	Tom of Bedlam: see Mad Tom
Slang: chains or shackles	Stuling ken: see Stalling ken	Topping cheat: the gallows
Slang: thieves cant	Swaddler: a thief who beats and murders his victims	Topping cove: hangman
Slipgibbet: see Scapegallows	Swag: booty	Touch: arrest
Snap the glaze: break a window	Sweating: removing metal from a coin, by using chemicals	Trounce: punish
Snapt: captured	Swing: hang	Tucked up: hanged
Sneak: a pilferer		Turncoat: one who has betrayed his friends
Snoozing ken: brothel		Turn off: hang
Sop: a bribe		Twig: realise that something is up
Spring-ankle		Two to one shop:
warehouse: prison	-T-	
Squeak:	Tail: a prostitute	

pawnbrokers

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

-U-

Underdubber:
a prison guard

Wiper:
handkerchief

Upright Man:
chief thief of a guild

Wiper drawer:
a pickpocket who steals
handkerchiefs

Used up:
killed

Wooden ruff:
pillory

Wry neck day:
day of execution

-V-

Vamp:
pawn

-Y-

Varlets:
criminals

Yelp:
cry out for the police

Vincent's law:
the art of cheating at cards

Vowel:
to write an IOU

-Z-

Zad:
a very crooked person

-W-

Waterpad:
river pirate

Wedge:
silver plate

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:
ressurrection men

Booty:
quota, swag, whack

Brandy:
bingo

Bribe:
dawb, grease, hush
money, sop

Brothel: academy, snoozing ken	drawing the King's picture, sweating	Escape: bing, burning the ken, hike, rub
	Courthouse: nubbing ken	
	Criminals being punished:	
	Being transported: barrow man, lag	
-C-		-F-
Calf, stolen: blater	In stocks: babes in the wood, nappered, overseer With hands burned:badge, charactered	Feign illness: sham abram
Call for police: cry beef		Follow: drag
Cart: gaoler's coach	Crow bar: Bess, Betty, ginny, jemmy	Fool: Ben, cullability, gudgeon, gull, milch cow, pigeon, queer
Cloak: calle		
Club: jordain, oaken towel		
Coach man: rattling cove	-D-	
Coin, fake: button, dump	Danger: lay	-G-
Coin shavings: nig, parings	Day: lightmans	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
Con: amuse, bilk, fob, fun, fuzz, hoodwink, sham	Death sentence: cramp word	
Con man: amuser, jack in a box, needle point, nip, sharper	Dog: bufe	Gang: birds of a feather
Counterfeiter: bene feaker, figure dancer, queer bit maker	Drunk: clear	Gipsies: cattle, moon men
Counterfeited: confect		Gloves: fams
Counterfeiting:	-E-	Good: bene, rum

	cracksman, draw latch, Ken Miller, Ken Cracker, rushers	black box, cursitor, petty fogger, puzzle-case
		Lead: moss
-H-		License: jukrum
Hanged: acorn, artichoked, beilby's ball, cry cockles, cropped, dangled, frummagemmed, hearty choked, hempen fever, ironmongers shop, jammed, leaf, noozed, nubbing, scragged, stretched, swing	-I-	Lie: amuse, gamon, palaver
Hangman: Derrick, Jack Ketch, Ketch, nubbing cove, sheriff's journeyman, topping cove, turned off	Inform: cackle, long tongued, nose, office, peach, rat, sing	Lock pick: charm, dub, kate, screw
Hideout: dive, fencing ken, flash ken, stalling ken, stop hole abbey, stuling ken	-J-	Lock picker: gilt
Highway: pad	Judge etc: beak, fortune teller, queer cuffin	Lock picking: black art, dub lay
Highwayman: colt, gentleman's master, high pad, knight of the road, land pirate, rank rider		-M-
Highway robbery: recruiting service	-K-	Man: cove
Hit: click	Kill: crash, use up	Mistress of brothel: abbess, aunt
Honest man: cull	-L-	Money: caravan, iron, King's pictures, lowre, plate, poney, rag, ready, rhino, ribbin, wedge
House: ken, panny	Lantern: darkee, glim	Mugger: ding boy
Housebreaker:	Lawyer:	Murder: hush

-N-	Police officer: bandog, bus napper, bus napper kenchin, hamlet, harman, moabites, myrmidons, night magistrate, pig	Riot: hubbub
Naked: abram		
Night: darkmans	Priest: autem bawler	
	Prison: Bilboes, boarding school, porridge, pound, queer ken, quod, repository, sheriff's hotel, shop, spring-ankle warehouse	-S-
-O-		Secure: rug
Oath: cap, earnest, rap (false), salmon	Prison ship: floating hell	Shackles: darbies, King's plate, ruffles, slang
	Prisoner: jail bird, queer birds	Sheep stealing: bleating rig
	Prostitute: aunt, bat, bawd, buttock and file, cattle, fen, laced mutton, public ledger, queer mort, tail	Shoplifter: Bob
-P-		Staff: jordain
Palming: fam lay, pauming	Purse: boung, dummee, reader	Steal: bite, bite the blow, cloy, curbing law, heave, hoist, lift, nim, prad lay
Pawn: pop, vamp	Purse, cut: boung nipper	Stocks: Bilboes, parenthesis, penance board, wooden ruff
Pawnbrokers: pop shop, two to one shop		Stolen: ard, made
Pickpocket: Adam Tiler, anabaptist, autem divers, bung nipper, buzman, foyst, natty lad, nypper, reader merchants	-R-	Swap: bug, ring the changes
Picking pockets: dive, figging law, forking	Receiver of stolen goods: family man, fence	
Pocket: cly	Rich: equipt, oak	
	Ring: jem, onion	-T-

Tavern owner:
beggar maker

content, provendor

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

-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

Thief, head:

Arch Rogue, Dimber
Damber, Prince Prig,
Upright Man

Thieves cant:

flash lingo, gibberish,
patter flash, slang

-V-

Victim: