

**DISCOVERING WORDS ON WEDNESDAYS JANUARY 20th –  
THEME: “MONTHS”/COMMON IDIOMS**

**This record of our discussions is intended as an aid to following up words and phrases further if you are interested. The order of what we discussed has been changed to make it all easier to follow and avoid duplication. Most of this is copied and pasted from information sent.**

**MONTH:** Old English "monath", one moon's worth.

**Monthling** (obsolete): a month-old baby (like “yearling”).

**Month's mind:** a (pre-Reformation) mass for the dead a month after burial, which came to mean something which was bound to happen.

**A month of Sundays:** a vaguely long time, not literally the time taken for 30 Sundays to pass.

**Phrases including named months:**

A marriage between May and December, as mad as a March hare.

Common saying: too much month at the end of my pay.

**Months as names:** well known are April, May and June, and variations of July and August. Other months less common. Examples known of a few thousands in US censuses: September and October. Others much less. February and March virtually nil. January Jones acted in "Mad Men". Months as business names seem rare. Horoscope signs more frequent; local bus company Libra Travel.

**Menstruation:** Synonyms include period, monthlies, related to fertility is the practice of sowing seeds by the phases of the moon. <https://www.charlesdowding.co.uk/post/moon-sowing>.

**Origins of months' names used in English generally clear. (\* = further details below)**

The original Roman calendar only had 10 months, because, curiously, the Romans did not demarcate winter for the equivalent of 2 months when no work was done in the fields.

In the 700s BCE, the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, changed that, adding January and February to the end of the calendar in order to conform to how long it actually takes Earth to go around the sun. The two new months were both originally 28 days long. It is lost to history why January acquired more days, though there are various unverifiable hypotheses.

At that time, March 1 became New Year's Day, but later, in 153 BCE, the beginning of the year was moved to January 1. This was confirmed as new year's day when Julius Caesar introduced the **reformed “JULIAN” calendar of 365 days on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 46 BC** (now often BCE = Before Common Era) on the first new moon after Bruma, the winter solstice.

It was superseded by the **GREGORIAN** calendar, though it is still used by some Orthodox Churches. The Gregorian calendar was **instituted by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582** and quickly adopted by much of Catholic, but not Protestant, Europe.

The papal bull issued by **Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 decreed that 10 days be skipped when switching to the Gregorian calendar**, However, only five countries adopted the new calendar system that year—namely, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and most of France.

**January\***: added and named later to fill “gap” – **after god Janus with two faces** pointing in opposite directions to mark beginning of year.

**February\***: similarly added later - **after cleansing ceremony Februa** linked to the Roman and Etruscan god of the underworld Februus.

**March\*** initially first month of Roman year. from the Latin *Martius*. Named after **Mars, the Roman God of War**.

**April**: links to “apricity” (warmth of the winter sun), aprication (sun basking) – named from time when second month of year, from root of Latin “*aperire*” = “**to open**” like buds in spring. **April Fool** (or Gowk - cuckoo - in northern dialects). “**April gentleman**” - a newly married man in Georgian times.

**May**: probably from Latin **Maia**, for Roman earth goddess, wife of Vulcan.

**June**: named after **Juno**, wife of Jupiter and goddess of marriage childbirth and fertility, from latin “*iuventas*”, youth, source of words like juvenile and rejuvenate.

**July and August**: previously Roman Quintilis and Sextilis = 5th and 6<sup>th</sup> month – as counted from March as original first!

**July was renamed after Julius Caesar**, because it was his birth month.

**August was renamed after Augustus Caesar**, his name meaning “**to inspire reverence and admiration**” and given to Gaius Octavius as an honorary title in AD 27 BCE after he seized power as emperor.

**September\*, October, November, December** = 7th, 8th, 9th, 10<sup>th</sup> months originally, and not renamed when 12 month year established.

“**Calendar**” from kalens/calendae, first day of Roman month.

Ancient Greek administrations all had their own calendars, day and month names.

**Periodic calendar reform attempts:**

**French Revolution calendar**: names from Nature: 20 Jan 2025 would be Laureole of Pluviose in Year 233.

**Auguste Comte's Positivist calendar (1849) used names of then famous men**, e.g. Shakespeare, Caesar. December named for now lesser known French biologist Xavier Bichat. If adopted no doubt revision proposals would have ensued.

**Chinese and Ancient Egyptian calendars**: systems of named days and months.

**Seven-day weeks not widely found in ancient schemes.**

**Twentieth century International Fixed Calendar movement defeated at League of Nations 1937;** would have had 13 equal months with "Sol" between June and July.

**Flippant scheme of month names by South African cosmologist George Ellis seems based in the northern hemisphere!:**

Snowy, Flowy, Blowy. Showery, Flowery, Bowery. Hoppy, Croppy, Droppy. Breezy, Sneezy, Freezy.

**IN JAPAN - Months don't have names, denoted by their number**

| Month     | Modern name       | Old name      |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------|
| January   | ichi-gatsu 一月     | mitsuki 睦月    |
| February  | ni-gatsu 二月       | kisaragi 如月   |
| March     | san-gatsu 三月      | yayoi 弥生      |
| April     | shi-gatsu 四月      | uzuki 卯月      |
| May       | go-gatsu 五月       | satsuki 皐月    |
| June      | roku-gatsu 六月     | minazuki 水無月  |
| July      | shichi-gatsu 七月   | fumizuki 文月   |
| August    | hachi-gatsu 八月    | hazuki 葉月     |
| September | ku-gatsu 九月       | nagatsuki 長月  |
| October   | juu-gatsu 十月      | kannazuki 神無月 |
| November  | juuichi-gatsu 十一月 | shimotsuki 霜月 |
| December  | juuni-gatsu 十二月   | shiwasu 師走    |

## **MORE DETAILS ON MONTHS**

### **JANUARY**

derived from the Latin *Januarius*, related to Janus, the Roman god, guardian of doorways and gates, patron of beginnings and endings. The Latin *janus*, means "doorway, archway, arcade." (hence "janitor", or door attendant).

**Janus is shown as having two faces, or bearded heads facing in opposite directions** i.e. looking to the future and the past, or the rising and setting of the sun i.e. solar deity.

***Janus cloth*** - a worsted fabric, each side of which has a different colour.

**Janus lock** - with duplicate faces so that the key can enter on either side, and the lock can be mounted on either a right-hand or a left-hand door.

***Janus word*** – "**contronym**" (or **contranym**) with conflicting or opposite meanings e.g. **clip** (on or off); **fast** (moving quickly or fixed in place); **screen** (hide or show); **wicked** (evil or good); **sanction** (allow or penalise).

**RIO DE JANEIRO** – literally "January River," named by explorer Amerigo Vespucci because he discovered it on Jan. 1, 1502, and so called because he incorrectly thought the bay was the estuary of a large river.

**DRY JANUARY** – New year's resolution to give up alcohol for a month. Links to **VEGANUARY** – Challenge to avoid eating or use of animal products for the month of January. Also applies to the nonprofit company which runs this event and promotes a vegan lifestyle.

## **FEBRUARY**

Before we adopted the Latin name (*mensis Februarius*) from the cleansing ceremony Februa for our second month, Old English used much more vibrant names to describe the month now known as February. The most common Old English name **was Solmonath, which literally means "mud month."** A lesser-used term was Kale-monath, which meant "cabbage month".

It's also the 12th month for signs of Zodiac

In Japan, February is ni-gatsu, literally "2nd month. The Old name in Kanji, "Kisaragi", translates to "month when you still need several layers of clothing to help you stay warm".

**CANDLEMAS**, Christian festival on February 2 commemorating the occasion when the Virgin Mary, in obedience to Jewish law, went to the Temple in Jerusalem both to be purified 40 days after the birth of her son, Jesus, and to present him to God as her firstborn. **Interesting that should be in month associated with pagan acts of purification.**

### **Strange link between Candlemas and Groundhog Day both on February 2nd**

If Maries purifieng daie,  
Be cleare and bright with sunnie raie,  
The frost and cold shal be much more,  
After the feast than was before.  
(Reginald Scot, 1584)

If Candlemas day be fair and bright  
Winter will have another flight  
If on Candlemas day it be showre and rain  
Winter is gone and will not come again.  
(John Ray, 1678)

**Groundhog Day** is a tradition observed in the United States and Canada on February 2nd of every year, with an emphasis on tongue-in-cheek humour and ceremonious proclamations. It is best known among people whose ancestors spoke German, especially the Pennsylvania Dutch. These European ancestors used badgers or bears to forecast the weather. It is related to the lore that clear weather on the Christian festival of Candlemas forebodes a prolonged winter.

It derives from the Pennsylvania Dutch superstition that if a groundhog (also known as woodchuck, marmot or whistle pig, to name a few) emerges from its burrow on this day and sees its shadow, it will retreat to its den and winter will go on for six more weeks; if it does **not** see its shadow, spring will arrive early. While the tradition remains popular in the 21st century, studies have found no consistent association between a groundhog seeing its shadow and the subsequent arrival time of spring-like weather!

The Groundhog Day ceremony held at Punxsutawney in western Pennsylvania, centring on a semi-mythical groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, has become the most frequently attended ceremony. Other cities in the United States and Canada also have adopted the event.

## 15th February

The festival was originally known as Februa ("Purifications" or "Purgings") after a supposed **purification deity called Februus and the *februum* (instrument used in ritual on the day)**. It was also known as *Februatus* and gave its name variously, as epithet to Juno. Her connection with the idea of vital force, the fullness of vital energy, and eternal youthfulness is now generally acknowledged. Juno Februata in her role as patron deity of that month, was thought to drive out fever – link to word “**febrile**”. (Also found reference to Febris, the Roman goddess of fever who protected people from fever and malaria, so also possible origin of the word “febrile”, linked to the purification god Februus.)

**Lupercalia**, also known as Lupercal, was the name for the pastoral festival of Ancient Rome observed annually on February 15 to purify the city, promoting health and fertility. People were ritually washed. This was a later version of Februa.

## MARCH

**March as a month from the Latin *Martius*.**

**Named after Mars, the Roman God of War.**

Roman feast of Atonement was *Dies Martis*, the Day of Mars.

From Mars comes ‘**martial**’: ‘pertaining to warfare’

A military court is a *court martial*.

4th **planet** from the sun, “**red planet**” – the surface of which, with its cover of **red oxide dust**, has now been photographed.

20th March is the start of the Northern meteorological and astronomical spring.

21st March is the **spring Equinox**.

21st March is the **first day of Aries** the first sign of the Zodiac (**Ares** another name for Mars).

In the Middle Ages, knights underwent an overnight vigil, dressed in a **red cloak**, preferably in a chapel dedicated to Mars.

In Rome the *Campus Martius* was the **large Field of Mars** where soldiers going to war would assemble. It incorporated the Temple of Mars. Returning soldiers would ride through often wearing semi-transparent tunics so that spectators could see the marks of their wounds.

For centuries, until 1752, **March 25th was New Year's Day** until Britain at last adopted the Gregorian Calendar. March 25th was also *Lady Day*, traditionally the day of the *Annunciation* to the Virgin Mary, with Jesus Christ being born 9 months later. Since Lady Day was the end of the tax year, and the above change meant a loss of 11 days, 5<sup>th</sup> April (Old Lady Day) became the end of the tax year, as remains the case.

A Martialist is someone whose temperament is warlike.

A *march* can also mean a **boundary** – especially on the edge of a country.

To march means to move forward in step with others.

Musically it's a piece of *military music* often with prominent drumbeats.

In alchemy, **Mars was the name for iron**, which reddens as it rusts and turns into iron oxide.

In alchemy, the third stage is *catharsis*, associated with the metal iron and the colour red.

*Iron oxide* in the earth gives *red ochre* pigment used for marking sheep and sold by the **ruddleman** (as in Thomas Hardy).

Mars' related gemstone is the *ruby*.

There were a dozen Christian saints called **Martin**, the best known of whom was the **soldier-saint and bishop of Tours** (316-397 CE).

As with the god Mars, in paintings he's often depicted wearing red.

One of St Martin's *good deeds* was to rip his red cloak in half and give half to a beggar.

The ancient Roman festival of **Martinalia**, associated with turning water into wine, became **Martinmas in Christianity – falling on November 11th**, and still associated with remembrance of war. *St Martin's Day* (the feast of St Martin) continues its associations with warfare and since 1920 with the *red poppy*.

In France, the **Oriflamme**

was the divinely given banner of St Denis or St Martin, described at Agincourt (1415) as a *red flag* bearing a wavy saltire.

In Japan, Yayoi is another name for March, which was also used in the historic Yayoi period (B.C. 10 – A.D. 3). “弥” has a meaning roughly equivalent to “finally”, indicating that March is the time when plants and flowers finally start to sprout. This name celebrates the arrival of spring and the emergence of new life in nature! Yayoi Kusama is an artist, born March 22nd 1929/

## SEPTEMBER

**September**, from the Latin, septem = seven. September was originally the seventh of ten months on the ancient Roman calendar that began with March. It had 29 days. This was the Julian calendar, a calendar introduced by the authority of Julius Caesar in 46 BC, in which the year consisted of 365 days, every fourth year having 366 days.

After the reforms that resulted in a 12-month year, September became the ninth month, but retained its name. The name was spelled Septembre when it was borrowed from early French into Middle English, but eventually the English spelling was changed to that of the original Latin.

September 11 2024 marked the beginning of 2017 in Ethiopia, thanks to the Ethiopian Calendar, which has 13 months and runs about seven to eight years behind the Gregorian Calendar.

**Michaelmas** is also known as the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels is a Christian festival observed in many Western Christian on 29 September, and on 8 November in the Eastern Christian traditions. Michaelmas has been one of the four quarter days of the English and Irish financial and academic year. The first term of the academic year in many schools and universities was known as Michaelmas term.

The **Archangel Michael** is considered as the greatest of all the angels; being particularly honoured for defeating the devil in the war in heaven.

The name Michaelmas comes from a shortening of **Michael's Mass**, in the same style as Christmas (Christ's Mass).

During the Middle Ages, Michaelmas was celebrated as a Holy Day of Obligation, but this tradition was abolished in the 18th century. In medieval England, **Michaelmas marked the ending and beginning of the husbandman's year** (farmer or small landowner). At that time the harvest was over, and the bailiff or reeve (Anglo Saxon times, local official) of the manor would be making out the accounts for the year.

Michaelmas was an important date in medieval times and into the 19th century. It was a time to celebrate, invite good fortune, and ward off negative forces. Some traditions included:

- Eating a well-fattened goose as an offering to protect the family's fortunes for the year
- Giving Michaelmas daisies, which bloom later than other flowers and are thought to protect against the darkness of autumn
- Picking crab apples and arranging them with the initials of young men to identify the lady's true love

## **SOME COMMON IDIOMS EXPLAINED**

### **PULL YOUR FINGER OUT**

This is an encouragement for someone to start working hard (especially after a period of low activity) but we do not need to literally pull our fingers out of anything!

However, in our nautical history, when cannons were loaded and ready to be fired, a small amount of gunpowder was poured into an ignition hole where a crew member would secure it in place by poking their finger in. When the time came to leap into action and fire the cannon, the crew member would be told to 'pull your finger out!'

Nowadays, we do not fire cannons but the meaning of this phrase has persisted and has been transferred to any situation where someone should take action quickly.

### **SPILL THE BEANS**

Another example is 'spill the beans' which many believe refers to an Ancient Greek method of voting that involved placing beans in a vessel. Nobody was actually spilling any beans—that would be very messy. To spill the beans was to reveal the result of the vote. Today, we use the phrase to encourage the revelation of information in a similar way.

### **TALK THROUGH ONE'S HAT**

'Talk through one's hat' means 'Talk nonsense'. Example: Nothing of what he said made sense - he was talking through his hat. The origin of this phrase is disputed, but there seems to be agreement that it was American slang to mean boasting or exaggerating, recorded from the C19.