

DISCOVERING WORDS ON WEDNESDAY JANUARY 7th - “FREE CHOICE”

The aim of this record is to help you to follow up any points of interest. Contributions are in the order presented.

BANDWIDTH

Reason for choice – daughter urging me to replace my central heating boiler – “While I still have the bandwidth!!”

Bandwidth – in technology – refers to the amount of data that can be transmitted over a network connection at one time. Higher bandwidth allows for more simultaneous activities.

To say that somebody “**HAS THE BANDWIDTH**” means they have the **necessary capacity (physical, mental or emotional) to handle a particular task or situation at a given time.**

It refers to a person’s ability to deal with stress without becoming overloaded.

In the WORK situation, if someone DOESN’T have the bandwidth, it is a way of saying the a person may currently be too busy or too stressed to handle an additional request or problem.

“BEYOND THE PALE”

Often confused with “buckets” but there is no connection.

“**Pale**” comes from the **Latin word “palus”**, a stake or pointed piece of wood. A variant of it is still in use as in “paling” fence. The term “pale” came to mean an area enclosed by such a fence, and was later used figuratively for an area which is enclosed and safe*.

Catherine the Great established the **Pale of Settlement in Russia** in 1791. This was the name given to the western border region of the country in which Jews were allowed to live. The motivation behind this was to restrict trade between Jews and native Russians.

Pales were enforced in various other European countries, notably in **Ireland (the Pale of Dublin)** and **France (the Pale of Calais)** formed in 1360. In Ireland, the Pale was the part of the country directly under the control of the British government – land outside it was considered unruly and dangerous.

The Pale of Calais was a fortified territory in northern France controlled by England from 1347 to 1558 and was a unique English foothold on the continent.

*n.b. It’s interesting that the phrase has come to mean “behaving beyond acceptable limits”!

ADJECTIVE ORDER IN ENGLISH

As in other languages the order of the words directly affects the meaning of a sentence. Native speakers take this for granted and learn the sequence naturally by ear, never consider the origins.

The order of adjectives in Middle English, for example as shown in Beowulf, came via Latin with the need to make translations from Latin via Aristotle later from Aquinas. But it wasn’t actually set in rules, just in oral usage.

Much more recently in the last two centuries people looked for a set grammatical formula and this was described by Mark Forsyth in ‘The Elements of Eloquence’ in 2013.

So as an example:



e.g. A beautiful big old round red French wooden carving knife

Sentence order became gradually defined with the merging of different oral traditions.

History of English Sentence Order

- **Old English (c. 450–1100):**
 - **Flexible:** Grammar relied heavily on word endings (inflections) to show a word's role (subject, object).
 - **Varied Order:** Sentences could use Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), Subject-Object-Verb (SOV), or other permutations, like "The man the king killed" or "The king the man killed," all meaning the same thing due to case endings.
- **Middle English (c. 1100–1500):**
 - **Inflection Loss:** Germanic sound changes caused many word endings to disappear, making roles ambiguous.
 - **Fixed Order Emerges:** Word order became more crucial; SVO became common, though flexibility remained.
- **Early Modern English (c. 1500–1800):**
 - **Standardization:** SVO became the dominant pattern, reinforced by Latin grammar studies and influential texts like the [King James Bible](#).
 - **Increased Complexity:** Sentences often became longer and more complex, incorporating Latinate structures.
- **Modern English (c. 1800–Present):**
 - **Rigid SVO:** The standard is a fixed Subject-Verb-Object order (e.g., "Pat eats bagels").
 - **Analytical:** Relies on word order and helper words (auxiliaries) instead of inflections, with variations for emphasis (e.g., questions, passive voice). 

Key Takeaway

The shift from Old English's flexible, inflection-based system to Modern English's fixed SVO structure was a gradual process driven by the loss of grammatical endings, making word position the primary way to understand sentence meaning. 

Notes on the 'English' alphabet

Forms of writing using a designated **alphabet emerged around 4000** years ago in the Proto- Sinaitic region around Egypt. By the time of the Phoenicians a **22 letter written alphabet** was spreading in use all around the Mediterranean, but **only had consonants**. The **Greeks added vowels** and this

moved into Latin through the Empire. By this stage there were a **couple of Etruscan additions, F and S. But the Roman world still had no J U or V in the alphabet.**

In England, the **Latin alphabet had arrived with the Roman Conquest.** The **Anglo-Saxon world** already used a language of Germanic origin which became Old English, using **an older runic alphabet** called Futhorc. This contained a runic letter ‘thorn’ with a **new TH** sound, and a sound ‘wynn’ which **became a UU or W. J and V were also added.** The evolving language now used in England had an alphabet of 26 letters but this included & and joined ae and oe.

By the period of Old English and into Middle English, ‘lowborn’ people had little use for reading or writing, so they still spoke “Old English” while scholars and nobility were using Latin or Norman French in speaking and writing. After two centuries of Norman rule the need for writing became more widespread and popular and English was being used, eg Chaucer.

By 15 hundreds **Caxton’s printing press began the standardisation of the use of the letters of the alphabet** in spellings. For example, V and U were separated, V becoming a consonant and U becoming a vowel. And J was included.

All this was recorded in **1604 by Robert Cawdrey in his work “ The Table Alphabeticall”** Today we have to consider whether some of the many online appearances constitute new additions to them alphabet. Eg. # ?

GREENLAND

Greenland was really green

Since most of Greenland is covered in ice, snow and glaciers. The Arctic nation is mostly white. So how did it get its name “Greenland” when it’s not really green? It actually got its name from Erik the Red, an Icelandic murderer who was exiled to the island. He called it “Greenland” in hopes that the name would attract settlers.

But according to scientists, Greenland was actually quite green more than 2.5 million years ago. A new study reveals that ancient dirt was cryogenically frozen for millions of years underneath about 2 miles of ice.

Source: <https://visitgreenland.com/articles/10-facts-about-greenland-that-you-might-not-know/>

Found after meeting: there is a lot of interesting information about this on the internet, e.g.

Scientists have discovered ancient plant remains buried beneath Greenland’s ice, revealing that the region was once green and ice-free within the last million years. The plants were found in a soil sample collected in 1966 and forgotten in a freezer until it was rediscovered in 2017. This breakthrough suggests that Greenland experienced significant natural warming cycles, similar to today’s climate change. The discovery acts like a time capsule, offering crucial insight into Earth’s past climates. It could help researchers better predict how Greenland’s ice sheet will respond to current global warming.



Engineers pull up a section of the 4,560-foot-long ice core at Camp Century in the 1960s. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

AI Overview:

Greenland's name comes from **Old Norse Grønland (Green-land)**, given by Norse explorer Erik the Red around 985 AD as a "marketing ploy" to attract settlers by suggesting a fertile, inviting land, despite the island being mostly ice, though its southern parts can be green in summer and might have been greener then.

The local Inuit name for the island is Kalaallit Nunaat, meaning "Land of the Kalaallit" (Greenlanders).

- Originator: Erik the Red, an Icelandic Norseman exiled from Iceland for murder.
- Reason for Naming: To encourage colonization; the sagas state he believed a good name would attract people, as noted in the Saga of Erik the Red.
- Linguistic Roots: Grønland combines Old Norse grønn (green) and land (land).
- Reality vs. Name: While much of Greenland is ice-covered, the southern areas do experience green summers, and the island may have been more forested when Erik arrived.
- Inuit Name: Kalaallit Nunaat (Land of the Kalaallit) is the Greenlandic name, reflecting the indigenous inhabitants.

Also a foreign source, Adam of Bremen in late 11th century Germany, gives another possible origin: In the ocean there are many other islands of which not the least is Greenland, situated far out in the ocean. The people there are greenish from the salt water (caerulei a salo), when Eto'o, that region gets its name.

Phrases and Traditions

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

This tradition dates back approximately 4000 years to the ancient Babylonians. During their 12-day Akitu festival in mid-March, they made promises to the gods to pay debts and return borrowed items in the hope of receiving divine favour. The Romans later continued this practice, making promises and sacrifices to Janus (see January).

“RING IN THE NEW YEAR”

This phrase comes from the ancient tradition of using bells to mark beginnings and endings. Bells were rung loudly at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve to “ring out” the old year and “ring in” the new, a practice also believed to scare off bad luck. The English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson popularised the phrase in his 1850 poem “In Memoriam”.

HOGMANAY

As regards this Scottish word for New Year's Eve, its etymology is debated. One prominent theory suggests it may be a borrowing from a medieval French cry, “**aguillanneuf**”* (literally, “To the mistletoe be the new year”) which was part of a tradition of requesting treats or gifts for the new year.

***“gui” is French for mistletoe**

“AULD LANG SYNE”

This famous song, traditionally sung at midnight on New Year's Eve, is based on a 1788 Scots language poem by Robert Burns, which itself drew on older folk songs. The title literally translates to “old long since”, or more loosely, “for old times' sake” or “days gone by”. The song is a call to remember old friends.

FIRST FOOTING was mentioned in connection with this.

Found after meeting:

“First-footing refers to the first person to cross the threshold after midnight on New Years Day. The first-footer must not have already crossed the threshold before midnight, meaning they must either be a brand new visitor to the house, or have left the building before the strike of midnight and come back in after.

Gifts are given as a token of luck for the coming year. These days this usually takes the form of shortbread or whisky, but traditionally coal was given to represent a warm hearth.

Tradition also asks for a very particular type of first-footer: dark haired men were preferred while women, and men with fair hair were thought to be unlucky. The unluckiness of fair hair is thought to stem from the viking invasions, while a fear of women may stem back to the notion of the Cailleach, a crone goddess of winter and death who took the form of an old woman who would mean peril for those inside.

Source: <https://folklorescotland.com/a-coal-for-the-hearth-at-hogmanay/>

JANUARY

This is derived from the Latin **lanuarius**, named after **Janus**, the Roman god of beginnings, gates and transitions. Janus is famously **depicted with two faces** – one looking back at the past, and one forward to the future. Hence January eventually became the name of the first month of the year, instead of March.

NEW YEAR

The phrase emerged in Middle English (1150-1500). Its earliest recorded evidence is from 1175 in the Ormulum, the 12th century examination of The Bible.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

The word “happy” comes from the Middle English **hap** meaning “luck” or “chance”, implying a wish for good fortune rather than just joy. The full phrase likely emerged in its modern form during the 18th and 19th centuries as greeting cards became more popular.

WEATHER see <https://www.etymonline.com/word/weather>

NOUN -

"general condition of the atmosphere with respect to temperature, precipitation, etc.," **Middle English WEDER**, from Old English *weder* "air, sky; breeze, storm, tempest," from Proto-Germanic ***WEDRA** - "wind, weather" (source also of **Old Saxon wedar**, **Old Norse VEDR**, Old Frisian, Middle Dutch, **Dutch WEDER**, Old High German *wetar*, **German WETTER** "storm, wind, weather").

This is said by Watkin* to be from “**root word**” **PIE *WE-DHRO**, "weather" (source also of Lithuanian *vėtra* "storm," Old Church Slavonic **VEDRO** "good weather"), suffixed form of **root *we-** "**to blow**." But Boutkan* finds this "problematic from a formal point of view" and finds the Slavic word the only likely cognate (i.e. connected, derived from same source)

(* prominent linguists)

Alteration of *-d-* to *-th-* begins late 15c., though such pronunciation may be older (compare with word “father”). **In nautical use from late 14c.** as an adjective, "toward the wind, **windward**" (as opposed to [lee](#)), as a noun "**direction from which the wind is blowing**."

Greek had words for "good weather" – **AIRTHRIA**, **EUDIA** and words for "storm" and "winter," but no generic word for "weather" until **KAIROS** (literally "time") began to be used as such in Byzantine times.

Latin TEMPESTAS "weather" ([link to “tempest”](#)) also originally meant "time;" and words for "time" also came to mean weather in Irish (*aimsir*), Serbo-Croatian (*vrijeme*), Polish (*czas*), etc.

Weather-report

The phrase "weather report" emerged in the 1860s with Admiral Robert **FitzRoy**, who coined “weather forecast” (from Germanic roots meaning "wind/sky") for scientific predictions.

For more information see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-32483678>

Weather-balloon is used by 1940.

Weather-breeder refers to "fine, serene day which precedes and seems to prepare a storm" and is from 1650s.

The Middle English surnames *Fairweather*, *Merriweather* probably reflect disposition; medieval lists and rolls also include *Foulweder*, *Wetweder*, *Strangweder*.

WEATHER AS VERB

"Wear away by exposure to weather"

"Become worn away by exposure to weather" (intransitive), 1789, from noun weather. Related: *Weathered*; *weathering*.

Middle English *wederen* was to "expose (a hawk, etc.) to open air; dry by airing."

Old English *wederian* meant "exhibit a change of weather."

Weather in figurative sense, from 1650s, in reference to trouble, danger, etc., "bear up against and come through safely," again from the noun weather. The notion is of a ship riding out a storm without damage or loss, again related to *Weathered*; *weathering*.

TO BE IN THE LIMELIGHT

Originally a limelight was a bright, incandescent lamp Invented by the Englishman Thomas Drummond in 1816. At that time, the British government wanted to survey Ireland using mountains as reference points. Their problem was that the weather was often bad, making it impossible to see the mountain tops directly.

However, when Drummond lit his newly invented limelights on the tops of these mountains, surveyors could see them from over fifty miles away.

The "lime" in limelight refers to burned limestone which gives off great quantities of brilliant, white light when heated with a mixture of oxygen and hydrogen gases. The white light from the glowing lime is then focused with a lens or a mirror.

Although it started its life as a surveying tool, it was its use in theatre that made limelight famous. At that time, **theatres were commonly lit by dangerous gaslights. These were jets of burning gas**, like the flame on a gas stove. Gas lights were dim, so it often took large numbers of them to light a scene on the stage, causing a great fire risk.

Limelight is much brighter than gas light, and its pure whiteness made it ideal for simulating sunlight and moonlight Its widespread use in nineteenth century theatre is where the associations with fame came from. To be in the limelight was to be front and centre, on the brightest part of the stage. In time, the word was applied to people who love to be the centre of attention, and may "steal the limelight" from others.

THESPIAN - *noun*: an actor; *adjective*: relating to drama -used in Britain from the 1670s

Thespis was a Greek poet who lived in the 6th century BCE. He was a singer of dithyrambs, stories from mythology with the chorus singing refrains According to certain Ancient Greek sources and especially Aristotle, he was the **first person to appear on stage as an actor playing a character rather than speaking as himself**. In other sources, he is said to have introduced the first principal actor in addition to the chorus: this single singer or actor distinguished between the characters with the aid of different masks.

This new style was called tragedy and in 534 BC competitions to find the best tragedy were held in Athens and Thespis won the first documented competition. Capitalising on his success, Thespis also invented theatrical touring; he would tour various cities while carrying his costumes, masks and other props in a horse-drawn wagon.

A stone relief on Giotto's Bell Tower in Florence depicts Thespis on the road:



His name literally means "inspired by the gods". So at what point did he acquire this name?

Link to HYPOCRITE from the Greek *hypokritēs* meaning "actor" or "stage player," evolving from the idea of someone speaking from *underneath a mask* (from *hypo-* meaning "under" and *krinein*, "to judge/interpret").

Originally a neutral term for a performer in ancient theatre, it gained its modern negative sense of a "pretender" or "dissembler" as actors were seen as assuming a false role, a metaphor for people feigning virtues they don't possess.

This led to a query about the meaning of Hippocrates, which comes from a different "root" e.g. "hypocrite", as does e.g. "hyperglycaemic".

Confirmed after meeting:

The name **Hippocrates** comes from Ancient Greek, combining *hippos*, meaning "horse," and *kratos*, meaning "power" or "strength," essentially translating to "horse power" or "strong horse".

Hyperglycaemic is built up from:

Hyper- from Greek *hyper*, meaning "over, above, beyond".

Glyco- From Greek *glykys*, meaning "sweet" or "sugar," related to glucose.

-aemia (or -emia): From Greek *haima*, meaning "blood," indicating a condition of the blood.

So, literally, it describes a state where there's **too much** sugar in the blood.