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Would you Adam and Eve it? by Paul Batkins



Would you Adam and Eve it? Or The incredible language of Cockney Rhyming Slang.

(Adam and Eve = believe)

Have you noticed what a two and eight the world's in? That's the reason why there are so many people downing pints of pigs at the rubber dub and just rabbiting on and doing nothing about it.

Now you probably didn't understand all of that, and I'd be surprised if you did! This is the language of East London, called Cockney Rhyming Slang. Allow me to translate the above sentences into correct English for you.

"Have you noticed what a state the world's in? That's probably why there are so many people having a pints of beer at the pub and just talking and doing nothing about it".

Cockney "rhyming slang" as it is called, was originally invented by the working class traders to outwit the police and unwanted eavesdroppers and is an ingenious way of using the English language in a poetic way so that the word that you want to express, (Which has no connection whatsoever with the two rhyming words), is hidden from the untrained ear. Although

it was invented 200 years ago, the language is constantly changing and more Cockney slang is being admitted periodically to move with the times. There is actually a Cockney wikipedia just click on this address if you would like to see more <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockney>

Cockney gets its name from Cockney eggs that are mishapen (as if laid by a cock). The word means (city folk ignorant of real life) (I don't know about that Ed!)

A True Cockney has to be born within the sound of Bow Bells. (These are the bells of Saint Mary Le Bow Church in Cheapside in the City of London near Liverpool Street). I myself was born in a town called Hackney in East London, and consider myself a true Cockney.

Today's Lingua Weekly Letter is all about this fascinating poetic form of the English language, which probably won't improve your knowledge of English very much, but you may learn a few words of trivial vocabulary, understand certain words that you may have heard Londoners say, and is I think of great linguistic interest.

The pronunciation of Cockney is similar to that of Estuary English, which is a more refined version of the Cockney accent, spoken by the classless Londoners of today. (see my Weekly Letter on 01 April 2005, but today we're going to concentrate more on the rich vocabulary pertaining to Cockney English.

Cockney Rhyming Slang uses words that rhyme (usually two separated by "and ") with the word you wish to express. For example: north and south (if pronounced correctly) = mouth. Trouble and strife = wife (I particularly like that one!)

Rabbit and pork = talk. However, the language suffers a further complication for the strangers ear because very often only the first part of the rhyme is uttered, making it virtually impossible for the untrained ear to guess the meaning of the words as they do not rhyme. Please allow me to explain.

If I said "How's your trouble and strife" to a man, he may well guess I mean his wife, but "How's

your trouble?" would not be so obvious. This was deliberately done to fool the listener in the old days. What's more Cockney Rhyming Slang is constantly changing and adding rhyming words.

There are a lot of Cockney expressions that even I didn't know. For instance : needle and pin = Gin, but this later got changed to Vera Lyn , (who was a famous singer during the second world war) so in my family " That lady can really knock back a few Veras " would be quite a normal expression. If the phone suddenly rang in a Cockney's house or at work you might very well hear "Oy, your wanted on the dog!" (Dog and bone = phone).

Cockney vocabulary has also spread throughout England and as far as Australia, and the Australians have even invented a form of Australian Rhyming Slang. (Copy cats. .Ed) Although people don't know why the expressions mean what they do when they are constantly saying them. I recently found out a couple myself that I've used all my life, but didn't know the origins of the words. For example: flashy meaning llamativo comes from the Cockney (Flash of light) = sight.

Cockney also has special words for amounts of money. A bullseye = 50 pounds a score = 20 pounds. A nicker = 1 pound etc. So if one Cockney says "How much bread you got in your sky rocket?" And another replies "about a score" What do you think is said in the conversation? Answer at the end of this Lingua Weekly Letter.

There are also Cockney singers who sing in Cockney Like Chaz and Dave who had quite a few famous songs including " Rabbit" "There ain't no pleasin' you" among others. There were also TV programmes like "Porridge". "Minder" and "The Sweeny " = Sweeny Todd = Flying Squad ie (The special armed undercover police) there are actors like Michael Cain , Bob Hoskins and the list goes on.

One can also find the Pearly Kings and Queens of London. Each area has a different pearly king and queen. Why are they called pearly kings and queens? I hear you ask. This is because their jackets are covered with pearls, and they are the Cockney representatives for their area. This used to show a person's wealth in the old days, but now it's just for show, and a lot of them also do a lot of work for charity.

Well, now you know a bit more about the Cockney tradition in London and it may help you to understand the odd word or two of Cockney if you're ever in London.

But even if you don't understand, I think you'll agree with me that it would be a terrible linguistic loss to lose such an ancient tradition as the Cockney Language of London.

Answer to the earlier conversation question.

"How much money have you got in your pocket?"
"About twenty pounds."

Bread (and honey) = money Sky rocket = pocket
a score = 20 pounds.

By the way, there is a BBC Cockney quiz if you would like to try it, now you know a little bit more. It's kind of a Cockney (50 por 15) and you might have some fun doing it. Just click on this address <http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/games/quizzes/index.shtml>

Vocabulary

Slang = argot
Down a (drink) = beber rápido
Trader = comerciante
Outwit = ser más listo que
Eavesdrop = escuchar a escondidas
Move with the times = cambiar con la moda
Misshapen = deforme
Cock (full name = cockerel) = gallo
Classless = de ninguna clase específica
Pertaining to = relacionado con
Rich = abundante
Trouble = problemas
Utter = proferir
Fool = engañar
Knock back = drink quickly
Copy cat (persona que copia "uso de niños")
Undercover = secreto
Pearl = perla
Wealth = riqueza
Loss = pérdida