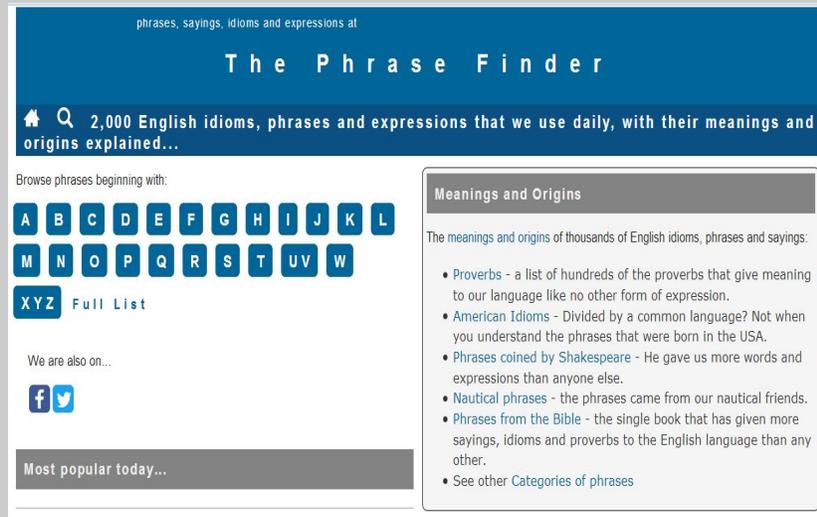


Home Page



Logo



URL

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/>

Subject

English language - Terms and phrases

Accessibility

Free

Language

English

Publisher

Gary Martin, Sheffield Hallam University

Brief History

The Phrase finder site was founded in 1997 by Gary Martin, who writes the Meanings and Origins section of the site. It grew out of post-graduate research into computational linguistics that was developed in 1985 in a Sheffield Hallam University research project into the use of artificial intelligence techniques to aid the teaching of writing.

Scope and Coverage

In 1998 a listing of the meanings and origins of phrases was added in this tool. That list of idioms and phrases now contains the origins

of more than 2,500 entries (as per Nov, 2016) and making it the largest such type of public reference on the Internet. The sources used in this work are two kinds, one primary source or second one trusted references. The primary sources include newspaper cuttings, books, films, photographic archives etc. The trusted reference sources are those that themselves derive from primary sources and have sufficient reputation to be considered reliable. These include: The Oxford English Dictionary, The Historical Dictionary of American Slang, The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, and Partridge's A Dictionary of Slang.

Kind of Information

In this tool entries are listed under a particular alphabet. Then within an entry meaning and origin of that particular phrase is available. See or see also reference is also present with some entry. Sometimes images are appeared with individual phrase. For clear understanding some examples are given below.

“Barking mad”

Meaning

Insane; intensely mad.

Origin

There are a couple of stories which link 'barking mad' with the east London suburb of Barking. One is that the phrase owes its origin to a medieval asylum for the insane which was part of Barking Abbey. The second story isn't a suggested origin, just a neat 1980s joke at the expense of Margaret Thatcher. She was known by those who disliked her as 'Daggers' Thatcher - not from a reputation for stabbing colleagues in the back, but because she was said to be 'three stops past Barking' [Dagenham is three stations beyond Barking on the London Underground].



The problem with the asylum tale is the date - it is far too early. 'Barking mad' isn't medieval and began to appear in the language only around the beginning of the 20th century.

The first record of it that I can find in print is from the USA. The 11th November 1927 edition of the Oklahoma newspaper *The Ada Evening News* reported on the frenetic and, if contemporary photographs are to be believed, borderline insane

sport of Auto-polo:



"At 2:30 this afternoon at Park field a half dozen barking mad auto polo cars will be whirled into action."

That usage suggests a readership already familiar with the phrase, and the playing of polo in cars, while having a strong claim to epitomise madness, isn't the likely source.

A much more prosaic derivation, that the phrase refers to mad and possibly rabid dogs, is a more probable source. There are many examples of 'barking like a mad dog' in print; for example, this from records of the trial for murder of a Walter Tricker, in 1867:

Mrs Hitchins, at the Inquest, says 'It was not ordinary barking. They [the dogs] were barking like tearing mad.'

See also: [barking up the wrong tree](#); [as mad as a hatter](#).

“ A bunch of fives”

Meaning

A fist. The fives are the five fingers.

Origin

The phrase appears in print in 1825, in Charles Westmacott's *The English Spy*:
"With their bunch of fives."



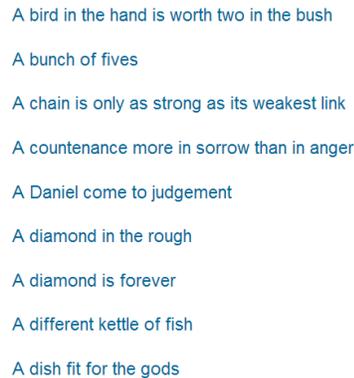
It is also reported as appearing, slightly earlier, in *Boxiana* by Pierce Egan, 1821. *Boxiana* is a classic work on boxing history and folklore, and just the place to look for such a reference, but it isn't easy to obtain copies of it these days, so that hasn't been confirmed here as yet.

Special Features

- ❖ Links to social network site such as Facebook, Twitter etc.
- ❖ The site hosted a searchable database of phrases and idioms called The Phrase Thesaurus, which uses artificial intelligence methods to enhance search results.
- ❖ Late in 1998 a discussion forum was added to the site, where anyone could ask questions on the meaning or origin of phrases in English. It contains an archive of 70,000 questions and answers about phrase origins and their meanings.
- ❖ Most popular list for today is available.
- ❖ This site also hosts an archive of the “Phrase-A-Week” mailing list postings.
- ❖ List of famous last word phrases present in this site.

Arrangement Pattern

Users can browse this tool in alphabetical order i.e. A-Z. Under an individual letter phrases are arranged in alphabetic order. For example the given screen shot (given below) represent that, under the alphabet ‘A’ the phrases are arranged in alphabetic order.



A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
A bunch of fives
A chain is only as strong as its weakest link
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger
A Daniel come to judgement
A diamond in the rough
A diamond is forever
A different kettle of fish
A dish fit for the gods

Remarks

It is a reliable reference source for linguist and related people. Also not only for the linguist, it also very much useful tool for those who works on natural or computational language.

Comparable Tools

- Glossary of linguistic terms (<http://www-01.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/>)
- Lexicon of Linguistics (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/>)

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