Complete Cockney Rabbit:

The Ultimate Dick 'n' Harry of Rhyming Slang

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Extract

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INTRODUCTION

Down the years much has been written by philologists and socio-linguists, all eminently better qualified than I in sweeping the gutters of the past to trace the origins of a form of speech that was born there. I don't pretend to be a slang historian – I leave that to those who have the time, resources and inclination to peer into the mouth that houses 'the vulgar tongue' – so when I'm asked about the origins of rhyming slang I have to say: I don't know. But then nobody does.

The most popular belief is that it began as a secret language of the underworld, formed in the mid-19th century as a means of confusing the constabulary and the casual eavesdropper who could be a 'nark'. That it was used by the lowlife of the day is undoubted, but they may well have been contributors rather than founding fathers. It has been suggested the seeds were planted earlier that century during the major reconstruction of London's infrastructure, when the foundations of a modern capital were being laid with the building of main roads, railways and the docks. The main workforce for these great undertakings was made up of local men and Irish immigrants and to perplex their 'foreign' counterparts the cockneys are said to have invented rhyming slang.

Another theory is that it came from the fertile imaginations of street chanters. These nomadic wanderers would travel from market to market (which at the time were known as 'fairs'), telling stories, reciting ballads and informing the populace of the news of the day. Because there were so many of these itinerant spielers, each had to develop their own style of patter which they embellished with colourful phrases and pieces of slang, some of which rhymed.

Although I have never made any attempt to research its history, with the aid of the Internet I have delved into the origins of many previously unrecorded terms. A look through these pages is like viewing a potted history of our recent past, via the people and events that our forbears threw into their speech. The earliest influences are the music hall and the Victorian stage, from where we find terms based on popular songs such as 'The Ratcatcher's Daughter' and 'Burlington Bertie'. Comedians,

singers, actors and other assorted turns are well to the fore with the likes of Lionel (Lal) Brough, R.G. Knowles, Harry Tate, Dan Leno, Jenny Lind and George Bohee. Early sportsmen are also on the mark – particularly boxers – including Jem Mace and Darky Cox, plus a jockey Tod Sloane and cricketer Charlie Pope thrown in for good measure. Various Victorian and Edwardian noblemen and women (the Duke and Duchess of Teck, for example) and politicians (Charles James Fox and Charlie Dilke) are also on show and then a few social reformers (Mrs Chant and Angela Burdett-Coutts) just to add a bit of class. The beginnings of institutions such as The Salvation Army and The Scout Association are noted by the inclusions of General Booth and Robert Baden-Powell and writer Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle makes an appearance on the back of his creation, the ever-popular Sherlock Holmes.

World War I could provide a book of slang on its own with numerous rhyming examples that reflect the horror of the conflict, often with the gallows humour made famous by the British. 'Dig my Grave' was a shave, whilst 'Stand at Ease' referred to the infernal fleas. 'Muddy Trench', 'Pork & Beans' and 'Terrible Turk' are just a few others. With the advent of film after the war, it was the turn of the stars of the day to get into the spotlight with Tom Mix, Anna May Wong, Mae West among others and later William Powell, Myrna Loy and Bob Hope. 1930s' boxers Jack Doyle and Elky Clark entered the ring whilst jockeys Harry Wragg and Charlie Smirke were also on parade. British variety is well catered for with all the members of The Crazy Gang on show, along with Max Miller and northern comic Sandy Powell.

World War II came and went, leaving a smattering of terms in its wake: 'Eisenhower', 'Lord Lovat' and 'Benghazi', to name but three. The late 1940s/early 1950s was the age of the crooner, with American singers Johnnie Ray, Frankie Laine and Doris Day among others all adding to the list, along with Brits such as Vera Lynn and Frankie Vaughan. Footballers the calibre of Tom Finney and Frank Swift rub shoulders with the likes of Prime Ministers Harold McMillan and Edward Heath, both of whom had apparently taken to crime.

The late 1950s was the age of rock'n'roll when the likes of Big Bopper, Buddy Holly and Adam Faith took to the stage and many

more climbed aboard during the 1960s, including George and Ringo, Acker Bilk and Manfred Mann. This was the age of TV and now celebrities from that medium entered the building with shows such as *Doctor Who*, *Take Your Pick* and *Dad's Army*, plus names like Benny Hill, Frankie Howerd and Cilla Black all getting in on the act. The triumphant World Cup side of 1966 is represented by skipper Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst, Nobby Stiles and Roger Hunt, whilst 'Man on the Moon' is a nod towards the 1969 moonwalk.

The 1970s witnessed the battle between Margaret Thatcher and Arthur Scargill, both to be found here, along with entertainers as diverse as Peters & Lee and Lou Reed. TV presenter Bill Grundy represents the punk era, indirectly at least, having lost his career after a disastrous interview with the Sex Pistols.

And so to the 1980s when the Royal ups and downs of Princess Diana, Camilla Parker-Bowles and Sarah, Duchess of York are on display as is the television revolution with the mention of Kerry Packer. The 1990s saw the invasion of the foreign footballer into the English league and names such as Ruud Gullit, Gianfranco Zola and Gianlucca Vialli entered the game (and the rhyming slang). And the rise of New Labour is noted with the inclusion of Tony and Cherie Blair, plus John Prescott. 'Popney', a type of slang based entirely on celebrity came onto the scene at this time and the likes of George Michael, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt, Belinda Carlisle and more recently Axl Rose, Sinead O'Connor and Simon Cowell have helped swell the ranks. Modern technology, such as mobile phones, pagers, scanners, printers, DVDs, etc., all have their own terms and when one considers how such things were beyond science fiction when cockney rhyming slang first started, it's an indication of how far we've come in relatively few pages.

Although I have tried not to take the work too seriously, I have in most cases attempted to age and to explain the terms behind the phrases; I have also raised one or two questions and thrown in a few theories for good measure. Rhyming slang (RS) is by its nature a fun thing that's meant to be light-hearted and humorous and this is how I hope it will come across to the reader and why, when asked, I refer to the book as a 'sort of dictionary'.

In the years since *Cockney Rabbit* was first published in 1992 there has been a tremendous upsurge in the use of rhyming slang,

its popularity no longer arising out of a necessity for a secret language but as a way of brightening up the English language. Many would argue that our tongue is bright enough and in the hands of our great pencil-wallahs past and present I would not disagree but the everyday speech of the common man is in the main unexceptional, though functional. The use of a colourful word substitute livens things up a bit and seldom fails to amuse: there is nothing funny about a bout of diarrhoea, for example, but reduce it to 'a touch of the Eartha's' and even if your rear exit currently resembles a Ford Mondeo's brake light, the misery of it is lightened. At the opposite end of the scale, constipation becomes less of a bind when referred to as 'having a bung in the bottle' and as a remedy, a 'bottle opener' sounds like a far better treatment than anything with 'lax' in the name. No one really wants to hear about lavatorial afflictions – or any other ailments come to that – but a well-chosen piece of RS can bring a smile.

Another great thing about rhyming slang is that it's a great leveller: the rich and powerful rub shoulders with the lowly and all treated with equal disrespect. George the Third might have been a great monarch but in this book…well, let's just say you wouldn't want him on your carpet! Stephen Fry may occupy a place on the top table in the acting and writing professions but in this production he must settle for a place on the table in a pie and mash shop. Other strange bedfellows include Donald Trump, Brad Pitt and Egon Ronay who take their business to weird mother Frank Zappa or ex-tennis menace Ille Nastase. Country singer Patsy Cline and racing driver Niki Lauder manage to get up people's noses and the least said about James Blunt and Paul Anka, the better!

Like everything else, rhyming slang suffers the ravages of time and as people become forgotten, in most cases their place in slang disappears to be replaced by modern characters. These days who tells 'Binnie Hales' or drinks 'Ralph Lynn'? Who plays 'Wilkie Bards' or goes on their 'Edna May'? Dead people, dead terms, but their names live on in these pages, so anyone offended by their role in RS should take comfort in the fact that they've also achieved a kind of immortality. Although known as the 'London Slang', it's no longer exclusive to the capital. RS has been picked up and carried on the airways of TV and radio to the four corners

of the UK. The boot of any Briton, not just a Cockney's, can deliver a 'kick up the Khyber'. Indeed, the cockney is no longer confined to London either. As the boundaries of Greater London expand to accommodate more and more people, so successive generations of Londoners have spilled over into surrounding areas, especially Essex, with Barking and Dagenham becoming the new East End. In towns slightly further afield, such as Harlow, Basildon and Canvey Island, more and more people can trace their roots back to the capital and as folk move, so the language follows and funnels its way into fresh ears, urging new mouths to repeat it. And as Britain gets smaller, the landlord of a hostelry in Devon is as likely to come from Bow as Bodmin, thus everyone, from doctors to dustmen and taxi drivers to tax inspectors all over the country gets to know a term or two of RS and drops it into conversation for comic effect.

As already stated, rhyming slang was originally the jargon of the lowlife and many of the terms and meanings have not risen above ankle level, but I have left nothing out on the grounds of bad taste. Had I omitted examples relating to taboo words, this work would have been considerably shorter, but incomplete. And a complete dictionary demands the inclusion of the unpalatable, the objectionable and the downright offensive. It is not the intention or wish of myself or the publisher to cause offense to anybody but merely to repeat established terms of slang, most of which were coined before the working man knew that words like sexism or racism existed.

Backslang

'Backslang', a form of slang that originated with 19th-century costermongers and was mastered by subsequent workers in the meat, fish and fruit markets, was another form of speech prevalent in London. Its original use was to bamboozle customers by talking backwards but as with rhyming slang, once the customers caught onto it, it blossomed into yet another weird and wonderful language. Soon drinkers were going to the 'bup' for a 'teenip o' reeb' or a 'slag o' nig'. The 'retchub' sold 'kayrop' and 'feeb', the 'neergresorg' sold 'elpas' and 'eganaros' and 'shif and piches' was a cheap supper. Smokers stuffed 'occabot' into

their 'eepips' and rolled it into 'gaffs' whilst others shoved 'funess' up their 'eesons' rather than lines of 'eekoc'. I have included some examples in this book, but a careful study will show the reader how to compose their own terms, should they so wish. You will note that in many cases I have added the backslang variation to the rhyming slang definition. For example, Abraham's Willing, a shilling, is 'Nillish'.

I became aware of slang from an early age – 'course I didn't know it was slang, I took it for granted that the 'reekab posh' and the baker shop were the same place, that 'uncle fred' and bread were the same thing and the 'carsey' and the lavatory occupied the same spot in the back yard wherein was kept a 'box o' lights' and an 'andlekay' which served two purposes: (a) you could see what you were doing in the dark and (b) you could keep an eye on what the spiders were doing in the dark!

My grandmother Liz Pyne was the backslang speaker, a true daughter of the East End, who would apparently converse with neighbours almost entirely in a language that her daughters at first found unintelligible My father was (in order): a layabout, snooker hustler, moody bookmaker and all-round dodgepot before he was found and conscripted. After the War he became a dock worker by day and a 'tic-tac' man by night, working at nearly all the dog tracks in the capital, of which there were a great many in the 1950s and 60s. Drawing from all the different avenues his varied career had taken him along, his slang vocabulary was considerable in all its forms.

Mother, God bless her, had a breathtaking array of words and phrases. To a child with a busy finger up its nose she'd say, 'Don't pick your nose, love, you'll go bandy.' Of anyone with a shocked expression she would say, 'He looks like he's seen one and don't like the shape' and if a film plot was unbelievable, it was 'like shit from China' (far-fetched). Her version of 'death before dishonour' was 'I'd rather be blown up than shown up' and her favoured form of slang was pig-latin or 'igpay atinlay' so I knew what 'amscray' meant before I could 'alkway'.

To the loud clanging of bells in 1948, I made my entry into the world at a hospital in Bow. Not the famous Bow Bells, of course – they are to be found in the church of St Mary-le-Bow in

Cheapside, a few miles away in the City of London. My delivery room was directly opposite the hospital bar and I arrived at the same time as they rang the bell for last orders. This apparently had a terrifying effect on me – which would explain the chronic aversion I later developed towards closing time! The 1950s was a great time to be a kid, especially in Poplar where I grew up. Being near the docks it was a regular target for the Luftwaffe during the Blitz and almost every street bore the scars of that one-sided encounter. Vast tracts of rubble-strewn wastelands, where once stood homes, long overgrown with a multitude of weeds, wild flowers and stinging nettles that I swear used to reach out to deliver their spite to the backs of little bare legs, remained throughout that decade and into the next.

The 'debris' or 'debrys' as we called them were our play-grounds. Health and Safety? Ha! The potholes, brick mountains and loose footings all added to the fun and the frequent cut knees didn't warrant sympathy from your mum – you got told off for using another plaster! Each child belonged to a gang and each gang had a debry, where we would build little huts out of whatever we could find and campfires on which we would roast potatoes. When it was raining we'd sometimes light a fire inside the hut – never a great idea as no one knew how to build a chimney. It wasn't long before a bunch of smoky-flavoured urchins poured out, coughing their offal up, and if the last one out didn't put out the fire, then up would go the roof (usually a piece of tarpaulin or an old door dug out of the ruins).

Most of the time there was no animosity between rival gangs: they played together, sat next to each other in class and were school football and cricket team-mates. But once a year came the wood war season. This occurred in the week leading up to 5 November when all gang members would scour the streets for bonfire wood and inter-gang rivalry became intense. At that time the neighbourhood had a profusion of bombed houses, the ruins of which contained a plentiful supply of wood and other combustibles. But that wasn't good enough. What we had, they wanted and what they had, we had to have. Raids into 'enemy territory' were mounted. This usually happened around five or six o'clock when your scouts came back and reported that all enemy

personnel had gone for their teas. There was always a guard, but he didn't count – he was often the youngest member of the gang. He would stand resolutely at his post, a saucepan on his head and a stick carried sentry-like against his shoulder, his heart full of valour. At the first sight of a bunch of screaming, club-wielding yahoos charging towards him he'd be off in the opposite direction to raise the alarm. As if synchronised, nearby doors would open in unison and the opposing army spilled out onto the street to begin the battle. Boys would trade blows over a rotted piece of linoleum, an old rafter would become the prize in a splintery game of tug o' war and perfectly good friends fought over a piece of wood they had stepped over 365 times since last year. Eventually the raiders would retreat, taking with them whatever spoils they could get away with and knowing full well that the next night they would have to defend their own territory.

With no television to keep us indoors and hardly any traffic to present a danger, the street had everything we needed. It was our football pitch in winter, our cricket pitch in summer (the two never crossed) and our permanent racetrack. On long summer nights everyone, children and adults alike, would be out playing, talking and sometimes arguing until dark. Those streets are not there any more – they were pulled down at the end of the 1960s to make way for a housing estate. In dreams I often return.

My first ambition was to be a footballer. At 8 years old the school sports master told me that I had the ability of an 11-year-old. Unfortunately when I was 15, I still had the ability of an 11-year old! So that was that. At 13 I got a Saturday job in the new betting shop industry and I was paid the staggering amount of £2/10 shillings (£2.50) to file away the 'sloshers' (losing bets). Bookmaking, I decided, was a good way to make money so I made my own book at school on the 1963 Grand National. This was not a success. The race was won by a 66/1 chance called Ayala and two people backed it. One was a spotty fat kid whom I had **never** liked and the other was the school hardnut from the fifth form, who insisted on immediate payment. Pleadings of insolvency were met by my being dangled upside-down from a railway bridge. Needless to say, I found their money. But they

bashed me anyway. Many years later, I bumped into spotty fatty wotssname – I still didn't like him.

My bookmaking career in ruins, I decided to venture into the world of rock'n'roll. The Beatles and the Stones were in the ascendancy and I would be a great guitarist; I would dethrone George Harrison. I bought a cheap, second-hand guitar and took it to my room, along with a Bert Weedon instruction book called *Play in a Day*. This was going to be easy. Ah, the sweet naïvety of youth!

I nailed a notice on my door saying 'DO NOT INTERRUPT UNTIL I AM A GREAT GUITARIST'. This was the first indication I'd ever had that my mother could read – she followed the instructions to the letter and I emerged a week later, an emaciated, skeletal figure with sore fingers and a total inability to even tune the bloody thing. Play in a day be-bollocks! Somehow I persevered, and after a few weeks' practice, I managed to string a few chords together. Great, I thought, I'm on my way. My father, though, had other ideas and took to clouting me round the ear and then taking himself off to the pub whenever I picked up my instrument. One terrible day I came home to find a demolished guitar; it had been trodden on. The old man maintained it was an accident, but I had reason to doubt this as I used to keep it on top of my wardrobe. Thus my strumming career was consigned to the dustbin of broken dreams and all I had to show for putting my fingers through a contortional hell was a busted guitar, a cauliflower ear and a parent with a drink problem. And George Harrison was still top banana.

Never a great scholar, I was more interested in climbing the Tree of Life than carving my initials on the Tree of Knowledge and at 15 I decided to drop out. With a courage I never knew I had, I marched into the school principal's office and told him that I was leaving and he couldn't stop me. He didn't try.

So there I was, fresh out of school and fresh out of work, but not for long. Through an old family friend I got a full-time job with East London's biggest bookmaking firm at the time, William Massey Ltd., where I learned all the aspects of bookmaking. Eventually I became a 'settler', and later, when I was old enough, a shop manager. It was during this time that I first became interested in rhyming slang, picking up bits and pieces from both sides of the

counter. I worked in shops all over the East End and the City, from the Docklands (before dockers became an endangered species) to market sites and all stops in between. And my vocabulary blossomed.

At 21 my feet started to get itchy – there had to be more to life than 5/4 the field and *The Sporting Life* – so I set out to find it. The next few years saw me drifting in and out of a variety of jobs, from a council building site to a Post Office parcel depot. Driving a lorry for a carpet firm and labouring in a saw-mill, where missing fingers were an occupational hazard. Not to mention that last refuge of the unemployed (and often unemployable): mini-cabbing. Everywhere I worked, I picked up a snippet or two of slang – even in a car showroom-cum-garage in Jersey, where I befriended an ex-pat Poplar boy.

In the early 1970s whilst watching a dire sitcom on TV, I just knew I could write a funny script. I now had a wife and a young son and this career move would make me rich. Move over Galton & Simpson, Speight and the rest, I was coming through! I wrote a comic masterpiece called *Worms Up a Lamppost*, for which I received a bucketful of rejection slips. Philistines! Heads of TV comedy departments wouldn't know a funny script if it crept up behind them in a clown suit and tickled them. Heeding the family motto: 'If at first you don't succeed, pack it in', I watched sadly as another dream bit the dust.

In 1977 I took a job driving a lorry for the City and East London Health Authority (as it was then) and found that being alone in my cab allowed my words and thoughts to emerge in tune. Could songwriting be my forte? Played in my head, they sounded great but I also discovered that I have a voice a bit like a 'nanny goat shitting on tin' (another of my mother's little eloquences) and I soon realised that a singer-songwriter I would never be. But a songwriter, maybe, if only I could get someone else to sing them. With luck I might be up there with Dylan, Lennon, McCartney, Jagger, Richards et al. Ah, sweet naivety of middle-age!

Of course, not being able to write music or play any form of musical instrument was a potential drawback, but a chance meeting with Lyndon Bournon, a brilliant, undiscovered guitarist from Romford, led to a collusion which enabled me to commit

my 25 compositions to tape. I liked them, Lyndon (a special needs teacher by day and musician at night) also liked them and used several of them in his act. He now lives in Canada and still uses them, so they can't be all that bad. Considering the time and effort I put into producing them, it still amazes me what little energy I put into getting them published or even heard. A couple of knockbacks sapped my confidence, I guess, and the tape marked 'Raysongs' occupies a place in a drawer somewhere. I still like the songs that remain unpublished and largely unheard so if anyone is interested, get in touch.

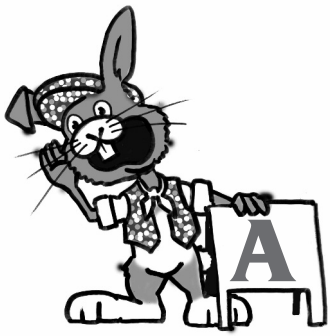
In 1989, whilst working as a courier in my own van, a large Northern driver of a large Northern lorry tried to fit his vehicle into the back of mine but failed abysmally. All he managed to do was to write off my van and put me out of work for six months with a back injury. To pass the time during this spell of enforced idleness I began toying with the idea of an up-to-date book on rhyming slang and *Cockney Rabbit*, published in 1992, was the result. The effect was startling, with books and websites devoted to the subject springing up all over the place. My term, 'cockney rabbit', seems to have become the established synonym for 'cockney rhyming slang' – just Google it and see. There was even a show of the same title.

Fresh Rabbit followed in 1998 and *Britslang*, a dictionary of general British slang, hit the shelves to widespread acclaim in 2003. And now *Cockney Rabbit* hops again. You will notice the size of the work: this is a result of me scouring every book and website I could find on the subject and even then I have still had to edit it. Soppy terms made up just to effect a rhyme on a famous name have been ignored. Lester Piggott (bigot)? Kevin Keegan (vegan)? No! Who would use them? And I regret ever including Germaine Greer (beer) in a previous book so I refuse to involve Britney Spears (beers) in this one. I have also tapped into the memories of some older people and found terms from the 1950s and 60s undocumented until now due to a lack of books on the subject and I have pestered younger people to see if anything new has entered the arena. Of course I accept that I may have bought a few dummies but if they tickled me or sounded genuine enough, then I have incorporated them

amongst the old, the established and the obsolete, making this the most comprehensive 'dick'n'arry' of rhyming slang ever.

My thanks to friends, relatives, strangers and all the unwitting contributors to this work and a special thanks to Fred the Ted for his list of forgotten terms of his 1950s' youth. Thanks also to Jeremy Robson for his backing over the past 15 years. And to computer wizard, Andy of EasyPC Systems in Dagenham for his help and advice on all things computorial.

This book is dedicated to the memories of John Skeels, a great pal, and Sylvia Reeves, a wonderful sister-in-law. Heaven's a nicer place for their being there.



A to Z — **Shed**

Probably after the roadmap people. Many men seek refuge and solitude in their 'ada'. A backslang shed is a 'desh'.

Abel & Cain — **Rain**

The biblical brothers get together to give the English something to moan about. When it's raining cats and dogs in backslang, it's 'nyaring tacks and gods'.

Aberdeen(s) — **Beans**

Mainly applies to baked beans but also serves as a spoonerism on 'ad a bean', whereby a hungry spoonerist may claim they haven't 'aberdeen' all day. A 'nit of neabs' – a backslang tin of beans.

Abergavenny — **Penny**

Originally a pre-decimal penny, which was handy for buying things with, not like today's model. 'Yannep' – a backslang penny.

Abraham — **Sham**

Pronounced 'abram', this applies to getting out of something by feigning illness. Known today as 'pulling a sickie'.

Abraham's Willing — **Shilling**

A piece that was defunct long before Britain's previous currency. 'Nillish' – a backslang 'deaner' (see Riverina).

Ace of Spades **Aids**

The traditional card of misfortune is said to have been drawn by sufferers of the disease.

Ache & Pain **Rain**

Reduced by 'aching' or stretched to 'ache & paining', either way it's time to don your 'titfer'; a term never more apt than during the washout summer of 2007 when torrential downpours brought floods, chaos and misery to thousands. See 'Tit for Tat'.

Acker Bilk **Milk**

An early 1960s piece based on an English clarinetist, who, along with his Paramount Jazz Band, was a regular chart-occupant during the Trad Jazz boom of the period. From Somerset, the man is more cider apple than cow juice. A 'slag of kaylim' – a backslang glass of milk.

Adam & Eve **(a) Believe**

Very old, very common and often an expression of disbelief – but I can't adam & eve you didn't know that.

(b) Leave

When it's time to go, it's time you were 'adam & eveing'.

Adam Ants **Pants**

Underpants from the 1980s, when this British singer was frequently in the charts. His trademark was his flamboyant dress. We can only wonder at the state of his 'adams'. 'Teenaps' – backslang pants.

Adam Faith **Safe**

A piece employed by betting office managers of the early 1960s based on a British singer, actor and later newspaper columnist advising on matters financial (1940–2003). No doubt he had an 'adam' of his own, but the term never got the better of the more widely used 'peter'. 'Eefas' – a backslang safe.

After Eight Mint **Skint**

What the 'after-dinner bachelor' is by Monday morning. When you're broke, in backslang you are 'teenicks'.

Aggravation **Station**
A term from the 1920s that suggests the arsehole-ache of rail travel is nothing new.

Ain't it a Treat? **Street**
A 19th-century term probably used ironically to describe a slum.

Ain't She Sweet? **Seat**
Before it became a sexist thing to do, gentlemen used to give up their 'ain't she's' to standing ladies.

Airs & Graces **(a) Braces**
Support for this term was suspended with the popularity of the belt.

(b) Faces
If there's some dodgy-looking 'airs & graces' in the pub, go elsewhere!

(c) Races
An early 20th-century term no longer in the running.

Ajax **Tax**
Based on the name of the ancient Greek warrior who later became a scouring powder and a Dutch football team. Now in the shape of a disc, he is to be seen on a car windscreen – or should be! 'Exat' – a backslang burden.

Al Capone **Phone**
An old, seldom-used piece that's probably as dead as the notorious American gangster himself (1899–1947). 'Eenophe'/'Eenof' – a backslang blower.

Al Murray **Curry**
An early 21st-century piece that fits in nicely with this British comedian's alter ego, the Pub Landlord, who would no doubt order a vindaloo for the lads and a korma for the ladies.

Alabama **Hammer**
Heard as an 'ala' on a 1990s building site.

Alabaster **Plaster**
Always said as 'ala', this is the bottom rung of the most

convoluted ladder of rhyming slang. When you reach the top, you'll find yourself at the bottom. See also 'Plaster of Paris'.

Alan Brazzle **Razzle**

On the razzle, that is. On a spree, bender, booze-up, pub crawl…whatever keeps your glass full. Coined with more than a passing nod to Scottish football international and later successful broadcaster and wine-taster Alan Brazil, who you may well bump into somewhere when you're out on the 'Alan'.

Alan Ladd **Sad**

As well as a sense of dejection, this may also be used to describe people with mundane interests. Anyone who by choice knows the difference in width between any two given railway tracks in the world is laughed off as being 'a bit alan ladd'. Based on the American film star (1913–64).

Alan Minter **Splinter**

Based on the Crawley-born boxer who in 1980 became a World Middleweight champion; the term was briefly used by woodworkers when tree slivers invaded their fingers, thumbs, etc.

Alan Whicker **Nicker (£1)**

A 1990s piece of youthspeak based on a British TV personality, which sees the Pound Shop become the 'alan whicker' shop. 'Reckin' – a backslang nicker.

Alan Whicker's **Knickers**

A piece from the late 1960s, when boys 'on the pull' sought to get into a girl's 'alan whicker's'.

Albert Hall **Wall**

Harassed parents are driven 'up the albert' by their troublesome offspring. Based on the Royal Albert Hall, Kensington, West London.

Alderman's Nail **Tail**

A very old term concerning an animal's tail, which may have originated in the meat industry. Most commonly associated with a dog's wag-piece, 'nail' was a 19th-century term for an arrest. So could a bent official of yore be in the frame here?

Aldershot Whore **Four**

A piece of army slang; Aldershot, Hampshire has been an army training centre since 1854. 'Rofe' – 'four' in backslang.

Aldgate East **Priest**

Based on a London Underground station, this is how the 'sky pilot' became an 'aldgate'.

Aldgate Pump **Hump**

To be displeased or fed up is to have the 'right aldgate'. Based on an ancient City of London water pump no longer in use, although it remains a city landmark.

Alf Garnett **Barnet (Hair)**

English actor Warren Mitchell's alter ego provides us with an example of how, when a term becomes as common as 'barnet fair' (qv), it acquires a piece of RS of its own.

Alf Tupper **Supper**

A 1950s example based on a British comic character; a working-class athlete who took on all-comers in a strip called 'The Tough of the Track' in *Rover* and *Wizard* comics between 1949 and 1992. He trained on beer and fish and chips, so an 'alf tupper' is often a fish supper.

Alfie Bass **Gas**

A term relating to the natural resource that's been on the back burner since the early 1960s when the British comedy actor (1920–87) was seldom away from our TV screens.

Alfred the Great **Weight**

Always reduced to 'alfred' by those wishing to decrease their waistlines. Based on the old King of Wessex (849–99), who was famous for burning cakes, not calories.

Alhambra **Camera**

A rarely-heard piece based on the name of a theatre built in London's Leicester Square in 1854 and demolished in 1936. Coined before anyone knew what 'digital' meant and the thought of putting an 'alhambra' in a 'dog' was pure sci-fi. 'Aramac' – a backslang snap-taker (see Dog & Bone).

Ali G — **Pee/Wee**

This recent term sees the owners of overflowing bladders nipping out for an 'ali'. Based on the comic creation of British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen.

Alive or Dead — **Head**

A 19th-century piece kicked into obsolescence years ago. 'Deeache' – a backslang napper.

All Afloat — **Coat**

A 19th-century term long consigned to the ragbag of discarded RS, it may have lasted longer had it applied to a 'floater' (boat).

All Behind — **Blind**

Applies sympathetically to those who can't see, but angrily to those who can, but don't. 'What d'you mean, you didn't see me? What are you, all behind?'

All Complain — **Rain**

Appropriate since bad weather brings out the moaner in all of us. Come to think of it, so does good weather!

All Forlorn — **Horn (Erection)**

The dictionary describes 'forlorn' as 'sad, abandoned and lonely'. This may then relate to waking up with an 'alfor' and having no one to share it with. 'Enroh' – a backslang hard-on.

All Night Rave — **Shave**

A modern piece in current use by young shavers. 'Eevash' is the backslang for shave.

All Quiet on the Western Front — **Cunt**

An overlong term used when Mr Unpopular, possibly a police officer, is about to join a group: 'Look out, all quiet!' 'Teenuc' – an unpopular person in backslang.

Allan Border — **Order**

Based on an Australian cricket captain whose success depressed many an Englishman. He now frustrates still more at closing time when the barman calls 'last allan borders'.