



# 1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue

*Francis Grose*

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## **1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue** Francis Grose

It was first available when Britain was under threat from Napoleon. The book includes gems such as 'ace of spades' for a widow, 'all-a-mort' to be struck dumb, and 'angling for farthings', which means to beg out of a prison window with a cap or box. Explaining the book in the preface at the time, the author writes "The merit of Captain Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue has been long and universally acknowledged. "But its circulation was confined almost exclusively to the lower orders of society: he was not aware, at the time of its compilation, that our young men of fashion would at no very distant period be as distinguished for the vulgarity of their jargon as the inhabitants of Newgate. The Dictionary Of The Vulgar Tongue: do you know your 'abbess' from your 'elbow shaker'? "Or Jehus of rank have a phraseology not less peculiar to themselves, than the disciples of Barrington: for the uninitiated to understand their modes of expression, is as impossible as for a Buxton to construe the Greek Testament." "To sport an Upper Benjamin, and to swear with a good grace, are qualifications easily attainable by their cockney imitators; but without the aid of our additional definitions, neither the cits of Fish-street, nor the boors of Brentford would be able to attain the language of whippism. "We trust, therefore, that the whole tribe of second-rate Bang Ups, will feel grateful for our endeavour to render this part of the work as complete as possible. "By an occasional reference to our pages, they may be initiated into all the peculiarities of language by which the man of spirit is distinguished from the man of worth. "They may now talk bawdy before their papas, without the fear of detection, and abuse their less spirited companions, who prefer a good dinner at home to a glorious UP-SHOT in the highway, without the hazard of a cudgelling." The work was also assisted by Cambridge scholars James Gordon and Hell-fire Dick.

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