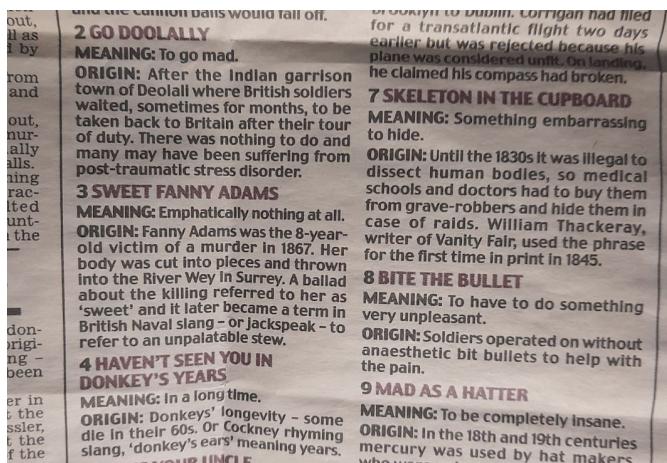


WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

Going Doolally^(3*) For Donkey's Years^(4*) (*see p2)

02/06/22 / Keyword: Sayings

Swiss linguistics experts have identified some strange English sayings after spending months looking for the most bizarre phrases based on frequency of use.



If you've got sweet Fanny Adams⁽¹⁾ to do and it's brass monkeys⁽²⁾ outside, you might just go doolally⁽³⁾. But while most English people would know that means that we might go mad because we have nothing to do and it's freezing cold, linguistics experts in Switzerland have identified these three sayings as among the most **baffling** in the English language.

They spent months looking for the most bizarre phrases based on their frequency of use, how they **came about**, and how they are used today, as well as how often they are misunderstood by native speakers.

The origins of the phrases range from historical events to military **slang** and sporting terms. Fanny Adams, the experts point out, was the child victim of a Victorian murder, while 'brass monkeys' actually refers to a way of storing **cannonballs**.

A 'red **herring**', meaning something misleading, originates from the practice of **dragging** a smoked, salted **herring** along the ground to train hunting dogs to follow a scent.

Others in the 30 phrases they selected, such as 'donkey's years'⁽⁴⁾, meaning a long time, originate from **cockney rhyming slang** – 'donkey's ears' at one point having been used for 'years'.

Franz Andres Morrissey, lecturer in linguistics and creative writing at the University of Bern, and Jürg Strässler, emeritus lecturer in

linguistics at the University of Zurich, said many of the phrases would probably confuse an English speaker from America, **let alone** a non-native speaker.

Dr Morrissey said: 'Everyday English is incredibly rich in imaginative language. Looking for the meanings of the many colourful, puzzling and at times **downright** surreal sayings takes us on a journey through history and sports, military and nautical **realms**, literature and culture and beyond.'

'Finding out about these origins says more than a little about the collective minds of English speakers. It shows a fascination with history, with in some cases quite graphic language play.' The research was commissioned by an insurance company, whose spokesman said: 'With so much of our language open to interpretation, the need to communicate clearly and concisely in important documents is more evident than ever.' (Read the expressions and their explanations on page 2)

Adapted from [this article](#) by ECP coach Darren "Kez" Kurien.

Useful vocabulary

baffling: impossible to understand; perplexing

to come about: to happen or come into existence

slang: very informal language

brass: a yellow metallic compound of copper and zinc

cannonball: a round metal or stone projectile fired from a cannon

herring: a fairly small silvery fish often found in coastal waters

to drag (context): to trail something along the ground

cockney rhyming slang: language used by London working class which changes a word for a phrase that rhymes

let alone: used to say that the first thing is more likely than the second

downright: (for negatives) totally

realms: a field of activity

Let's chat about that!

1. Do you understand all the phrases on page 2?
2. Can you think of any strange phrases in your language?
3. Do you know the origins of these phrases?
4. How difficult would it be for a non-native to understand them?
5. Do you like these phrases or do you think that we should always try and talk clearly?

1. Sweet Fanny Adams

Meaning: Emphatically nothing at all.

Origin: Fanny Adams was the eight-year-old victim of a murder in 1867. Her body was cut into pieces and thrown into the River Wey in Surrey. A ballad about the killing referred to her as 'sweet'

2. It's brass monkeys outside

Meaning: Freezing cold weather.

Origin: 'Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey'. A ship's cannon balls used to be stacked on a brass structure called a 'monkey' – the brass would contract in cold weather and the cannon balls would fall off.

3. Go doolally

Meaning: To go mad.

Origin: After the Indian garrison town of Deolali where British soldiers waited, sometimes for months, to be taken back to Britain after their tour of duty. There was nothing to do and many may have been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

4. Haven't seen you in donkey's years

Meaning: In a long time.

Origin: Donkeys' longevity – some die in their 60s. Or Cockney rhyming slang, 'donkey's ears' meaning years.

5. A red herring

Meaning: Something misleading

Origin: From the practice of dragging a smoked, salted herring along the ground to train hunting dogs to follow a scent.

And a bonus one! Bob's your Uncle

Meaning: To achieve something with great ease.

Origin: In 1886 Prime Minister Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (Lord Salisbury) made Arthur Balfour Chief Secretary of Ireland, to the surprise of observers at the time. Arthur Balfour was 'Bob's' nephew.

Coffee Saturdays

(a free
LIVE! English
event)



2nd April
7th May
4th June

10:30 - 11:30

Panadería Bertiz
c/ Francia 10
Vitoria-Gasteiz



Cinema Nights
(a free
LIVE! English
event)

Wednesday 27th April 19:30
Friday 27th May 18:30
Friday 24th June 18:30

PRODUCTION
DIRECTOR
CAMERA PERSON
SCENE
TAKE

Roll
657 73 13 54

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/KWK2ROnesTV5OgRaWYmbl>



ECP PLAYLIST PARTY



Friday 10th June @ 19:30

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/KWK2ROnesTV5OgRaWYmbl>
Click on the link
or scan the QR code