THE LIVING HISTORY CENTRE

# RENAISSANCE PLEASURE FAIRE®

# BASIC FAIRE LANGUAGE GUIDE

## *or*

## *Mothers Wit's Book of Extempore Speech*

*Being of no small benifit to the Divers Citizens of Chipping-under-Oakwood*

© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

KATHLEEN BARTHOLOMEW and
KAGE BAKER...the Mothers Wit.

*Design, Production, & Typesetting* —
CATE BRAMBLE

© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

The purpose of this guide is to teach you to speak Elizabethan English as a second language. You can become so fluent and conversational that you charm and delight our visitors from the twentieth century, who come to our shire hoping to be convinced they are in a sixteenth-century market village.

We are all Elizabethans here in Chipping-under-Oakwood. You have worked hard making your costume; you've developed the character you play. Now we are going to give you a voice.

English as it was spoken in Elizabeth's day was a different language, nothing like the English spoken in England today. How do we know what Elizabethans sounded like? The Faire consulted Dr. Robert Easton, a scholar of dialects; he taught us the basic pronunciation we use. (The tape of his lecture is available from the Entertainment Department.) The actual words people used, the sentences they constructed, and the figures of speech are all easy to duplicate. Elizabethans were a literate, inventive people. The classiest act by far was William Shakespeare. His plays will help you learn to speak Elizabethan.

## TITLES AND GREETINGS

Elizabethans didn't say "Hello." What did they say instead? They said:

*Good day!*
*Good morrow!* (Meaning exactly the same thing.)
*Well met!* (Meaning "Boy, am I glad to see you!")
*How now!* (Literally, "How ya doing?")
*God give you a good day.*

So now you have a greeting on the tip of your tongue. But what kind of title goes with it? Who is this person standing in front of you? Is it:

An elderly man? You could say *Good day, good sir.* In fact, you can use this greeting to just about any male of any station or age. Is this an old peasant? You could say *Good day to thee, Father*, or *Good day to thee, Gaffer* (*Gaffer* is short for grandfather). This would be more of an affectionate greeting than a respectful one. Or, you could say *Good day, old lad*, but this would really be on the rude side unless you too are an elderly man. Do you know his name? You could say *Good day, Gaffer Jones*, or *Good day, Father Culpepper.* (And no, you are not implying that he's a priest—*Father* is just a term of respect.) Or, simply: *Good day, Master Fuller.* Elizabethans used *Master* just as we use "Mister."

Is this person an elderly woman? You can say *Good day, good mistress.* That is neutral and polite. Or you could say *Good day to thee, Gammer*, which is short for grandmother. You could say *Good day, me old lass* if you happened to be her old lad. And you can always address her by her name: *Good day, Mistress Smith.*

Are you facing a respectable-looking man of adult years? You can address him as *Sir* or as *Master*. This is courteous without being servile.

Is his profession obvious? Does he carry a bow and arrows, or does he wear a leather apron and carry a hammer? Or perhaps he has a mandolin on his shoulder? You could say *Good day, Master Archer*, or *Master Blacksmith* or *Master Musician*. Of course if you know his name, that's what you call him by. Is he a peasant? You can say *Good morrow, Goodman* or even *Good my man*—about the politest way possible to greet him while acknowledging that he's poorer than you are (if he *is*). He would take no offense at such a greeting, either: he'd assume you were a nice, courteous person. And courtesy meant a lot to Elizabethans.

Is this a woman you see before you, of mature years? *Good day, good mistress* is just about right. So is *Good lady*. Is this a homey, housewifely person? You can call her *Good mother* or *Goodwife* or even *Good gossip*.

Is this a fine, lusty young fellow you are greeting? You can say *Good day, my fine lad.*

Or is it a young lady? Again, you could use *lady* or *mistress*. If you feel like being complimentary, you



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

can call her *sweet mistress, dear mistress, fair mistress,* or what you will. By the way, there is no dirty joke here: you are not implying that she is your "mistress" in the modern sense. *Mistress* was simply the Elizabethan form of "Ms." It was a polite title making no reference to her marital status or rank. If you're being particularly flirtatious, you can call her *pretty maid, sweet lass,* or even *sweetheart.*

Is it a little boy? *Little sir, little master, young lad* will all do well. Simply to call him "boy" would be rude, and what we are discussing here is courteous address.

Is it a little girl? Obviously, you can call her *little mistress, little lady, little lass.* You can also call her *little wench.*

Concerning the word *wench...*

*Wench,* to Elizabethans, didn't mean "slut." It did not mean doxy, whore, bawd, or anything insulting. It simply meant *girl.* A woman's father, or husband, or close friends might all call her *wench,* very affectionately.

And, while we're on the subject:

## THREE FORMS OF ADDRESS YOU DO NOT USE IN POLITE CONVERSATION

1. *Sirrah.* This is not a form of the word *sir.* It is an insult, and you use it on bad little boys, lazy servants, and any male you wish to infer is a lying rogue.
2. *Sire.* You might address your king as *sire,* but there isn't one on the throne right now. You do not use it as a substitute for *sir.* Anyway, it sounds medieval.
3. *Fellow.* Innocent as this word sounds to us, the average Elizabethan male appears to have felt insulted being addressed merely as *fellow.* Apparently it had the same general meaning as *dude* or *pal.*

Now. What if this person in front of you is a noble man or woman? Forget their age or appearance: it would be foolish and rude to refer to either, unless you are noble yourself. You say *my lord; my lady; your worship; noble sir; noble lady; noble madam; good my lord; good my lady.* If there's a pair of them, say *Good gentles.*

You now have a greeting appropriate to the person to whom you are speaking. The two of you stand there and shoot the breeze for a moment, and then it's time to go. How do you say goodbye?

Some of this depends on you. If your character is well-bred (or *thinks* he or she is), you might say *Adieu.* If you're an ordinary person you might say:

*I shall see thee anon.*
*God save thee* (or *you*).
*God keep thee* (or *you*).

You may also say just *anon,* which means "I'll see you later," but it doesn't have the vagueness of the modern expression. It means I *will* see you at a specific time later in a specific place.

And now you've met, greeted, and bid goodbye to a fellow villager. *Congratulations!*

## MORE BASIC PARTS OF SPEECH

How do you say yes and no? Well, you can say *yes* or *no,* but it's much more colorful if you say *aye* and *nay,* or even *yea* and *nay.*

What about some catch phrases to liven up your speech? Here are some lovely things you can stick in your conversations, and their approximate twentieth-century meanings.

Where you would say "No kidding—really?" you can now say:

*Forsooth!* (*Sooth* means truth) or
*In good sooth!* or
*Go to!* or
*Is it even so?*



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

Where you would normally say "Wow!" you can now say:

*Marry!* (A contraction of "By Saint Mary!") or
*I'faith!* or
*Now, by my faith!*

Where you would say "Excuse me," you now say:

*I cry you mercy* or
*I crave your pardon.*

Where you would say "Please," you can now say:

*An it please you* (*an* is an old form of "if") or
*Prithee* or
*I pray you;* or simply
*Pray.* ("Pray, what be the time?")

Where you would say "Thank you," now say:

*I thank thee,* or
*I do humbly thank you,* or
*Many thanks, good sir.* (Or whatever.)

Where normally you'd say "Darn it!" say:

*Alack!* or
*Alackaday!* or
*Alas!* or
*Fie!* or
*Out upon it!*

Whatever your favorite twentieth-century expletive is, it's a safe bet they didn't use it in Elizabethan England. We'll get into oaths and imprecations later (the Elizabethans had some dandies), but when you're in character leave the four-letter kind out of your speech.

## MISCELLANEOUS GOOD

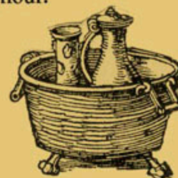
Contractions: *T'was; T'is; is't; e'en* ("both," or *even* and *evening*); *o'er; ne'er' t'were.* Do not use modern contractions—say both words instead.

Double negatives and double superlatives, such as "I have not got no shoes," "The most unkindest cut of all," "She is more beautifuller," were not only correct grammar at this period, they were considered refined.

The use of *be* to replace is, am, and are, as in the immortal "I be long John Silver, ar, ar, ar," or "We be loyal Englishmen all."

Gratuitous use of the word *do* before a verb: "If I do go to the tavern this day, I do think me I shall meet with thieves." Or "She did go to market, but did find naught there that did please her."

When engaging in conversation, where you might say "So then I said—" or "So she said to me—" you can use the lovely old word *quoth.* Example: "'Now, Richard,' quoth I, 'thou hadst best get on thy way before daybreak.' 'Faith,' quoth he, 'only let me sleep another hour.' "



## MISCELLANEOUS BAD

*Don't* use the contraction "ain't." It hadn't developed yet. We think it came in with the Victorians.

*Don't* use that famous exclamation from old Musketeer movies: "Zounds!" The word as it actually existed (and as you can use it) was *S'wounds!*—short for "God's wounds," that is, the five holy wounds of Christ.

*Don't* use modern Americanisms such as Yeah, Sure, Nope, Uh-huh, Y'know, Okay. (You would think these words are so *obviously* twentieth-century that nobody would make this mistake—but then we've actually had people ask us whether or not Elizabethans had *television.*)



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

## THE SOUNDS OF ELIZABETHAN

**WANT:** You, as an American, probably pronounce this word as "waunt," but in Elizabethan times the *a* in want was sounded like the *a* in the words flat, fat, or wax. So *want* now rhymes with *pant*. Likewise, *water* rhymes with *hatter*. Try this sound with words like father, salt, air, was, fall, halt, hark—not *aw* but *aa*.

**MAKE:** In Elizabethan, this word is sounded as "mek." They tended to use a short *e* sound where we use a long *a*. So *take* becomes *tek*, *table* becomes *teble*, *plate* becomes *plet*. This sound should be drawn out, like the name of the river Thames: *Te-ems*.

You can see that the Elizabethans didn't have the drawling *aah* sound their well-bred descendants use. None of that "Faththah, I'd rahthah naht goew to the cahstle," here!

**HEAD:** This word is pronounced "haid." Likewise, *dead* becomes *daid*, *bread* becomes *braid*, *lead* becomes *laid*. Where have you heard this sound before? In Appalachian America. Why? Because their ancestors came over from England shortly after Elizabeth's time. They moved up into those mountains and stayed there, isolated from the sounds of the rest of the country until radio and television came along. They preserved the sounds of their ancestors' speech, just as they preserved their customs and folklore.

**I:** This word is pronounced "uh-ee." Anywhere the long i or y sound occurs in Elizabethan English, they are pronounced this way. So *my* is sounded *muh-ee*, *die* is *duh-ee*, *fly* is *fluh-ee*. Avoid the trap of rounding your lips on *i* and pronouncing it as *oi*: that is *bad* vaudeville-stage Irish.

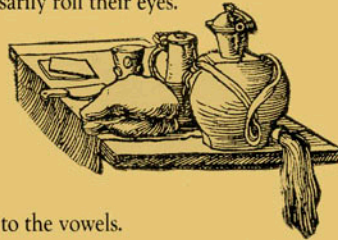
**BIT:** This word is unchanged. The short i sound was used then just as it is now. *It* is still *it*, *still* is still *still*.

**MERCY:** Pronounced in modern American as "murcy." In Elizabethan it was sounded more like it is written, which makes it come out *maircy*. Notice the very *harrd* pronunciation of the letter r. This is another Elizabethan holdover in American speech. We pronounce our letter *r* very clearly, whereas the modern Britons tend to slur and soften it into an *ah* sound.

With one exception...

Everyone knows how the old English pirates talked, right? "Arr, me hearrties, I be Long John Silverr and I knows wherre the trreasurre be..." We think of pirates sounding like that because of the late Robert Newton, who portrayed Long John Silver so memorably and so often that he managed to crowd even Wallace Beery out of people's minds. Everyone since has used Newton's particular accent when trying to do a vocal impersonation of a pirate. Think of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride at Disneyland: wall-to-wall Robert Newton impressions. But Robert Newton came from a very rural and conservative part of England where the spoken language hadn't changed much since Elizabeth's day. When he was cast as Long John Silver, he decided to do an old-fashioned voice characterization for the part, so he fell back on the country accents he'd grown up with.

The moral of the story is, Elizabethans always pronounced their R's, though they didn't necessarily roll their eyes.



Back to the vowels.

**FAIR:** Ai is a dipthong. The *a* is the flat *a* as in wax, and the i is the Elizabethan *uh-ee* sound. Also, the *r* is very severely pronounced. So the word comes out *Faa-er*.

**NEITHER:** *Ei* is another dipthong. Short *e*, short *i*: it comes out as *nayther*.

**DAY:** Ay, yet another dipthong, this time with the Elizabethan long i and short *a*. Pronounced *daa-ee*.

**LORD:** The short *o* is pronounced with considerable lip-rounding, and the sound is drawn out. *Lord* becomes *loord*, *word* becomes *woord*, *come* becomes *coom*, and so on.



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

**DOWN:** This vowel combination is pronounced *uh-oo*, and the word becomes *duh-oon*. Any *ow* or *ou* sound in Elizabethan is pronounced *uh-oo*. *House*, for example, is *hu-oose*. People in Canada still preserve this sound *(suh-oond)*; so do people in parts of North Carolina.

**CUP:** The short *u* is drawn out and rounded—not *uh* but *ooo*. Thus, *cup* becomes *coop*, *up* becomes *oop*, *cut* becomes *coot*.

**LOVE:** Modern America sounds this *o* as *uh*, exactly like the short *u* in *cup*. But again, the Elizabethans draw the sound out, and it is pronounced the same way the Beatles pronounced it—*luv*.

These are all particularly Elizabethan vowel sounds, specifically different from modern sounds—they are one of the ingredients adding to the flavor of your accent. Naturally, these rules apply to all words just as we have illustrated them in these examples.

Three more things to remember:

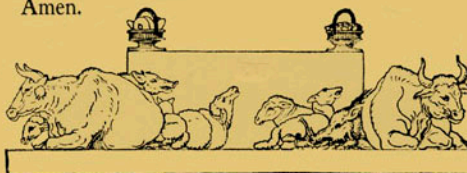
*Never* drop the beginning *h*'s on words. No 'Enery 'Iggins, 'ere, thank you very much. That's Victorian Cockney.

*Do*, however, drop the final g's on words ending in *ing*: runnin', kissin,' walkin', drinkin', and so forth.

*Never* use *sh* for *st* sounds. Americans tend to turn a t followed by a y or *i* sound into a *ch* sound, so that "Got you" becomes "Gotcha," "I bet you" becomes "I betcha," and the word "Righteous" becomes "Richuss." *Don't do this!* On the whole, Elizabethans spoke much more slowly and clearly than we do.

Now that we've given you the basic different sounds, you can try them out in the following exercise. This is the text of the 23rd Psalm as it is found in the King James Version of the *Bible*, circa 1611. This was just at the end of the Elizabethan era and the language was still in full flower. Here we have emphasized the distinctly different Elizabethan sounds. Try reading the Psalm aloud, using the pronunciation you have learned.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.
Amen.



The next hurdle is *thee/thou* versus *you*. We will explain.

Most Romance languages, such as French and Spanish, have a formal and informal mode of address. The French schoolboy addresses his buddies as *tu*; his parents and teachers he addresses as *vous*, or runs the risk of being considered rude and impertinent. Most languages still use both modes of address—one formal and polite, the other casual and intimate.

English at one time had its formal and informal modes, too. The formal, used to one's social superiors and strangers to whom one wished to be polite, was *you*. The informal, used to one's intimates or social inferiors, was *thou*.



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

Example: "How are you?" can appropriately be said to:

Your parents;
Your employer;
Any noble person;
Any person you are flattering; and
Horses, because they're noble animals. (If you can find a horse at Faire to have a conversation with, go to it!)

Whereas, "How art thou?" would be appropriately said to:

Your husband or wife;
Your close friends;
Your children;
Your servants;
Your non-horse pets and animals;
Any person you are insulting;
Inanimate objects; and
God (because presumably He is your intimate). This last usage, by the way, is the *only* place where modern English still uses the intimate mode of address.

If you think about this list you can see that nobody ever, but *ever*, calls the Queen *thou*; and she doesn't have to call anybody *you*—unless she talks to her horse.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that thee and thou are only two different forms of the same word. They aren't. *Thou* is the subject of sentences, as in "What hast thou done?" and *thee* is the object of sentences, as in "I shall tell thee a secret."

And what about all those antique verb forms—those *ost*, *est*, and *eth* words? Behold, here are some examples all nicely conjugated for you—to show you what person gets the funny endings:

I do. Thou dost. You do.
He/She/It doth (or does).

I love. Thou lovest. You love.
He/She/It loveth (or loves).

I have loved. Thou hast loved. You have loved.
He/She/It hath loved (or has loved).

As you can see, the antique verbs are used with the second person intimate, or the third person—never with the first person.

Here's the possessive forms:

**Thy** is the possessive used before words beginning with a consonant, as in "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

**Thine** is the possessive used before words beginning with a vowel, as in "Drink to me only with thine eyes."

The possessive form of *you* doesn't change, of course—it's still *your*.

The same rule applies to *my* and *mine* as it does to *thy* and *thine*. *My* is used before words beginning with a consonant, and *mine* is used before words beginning with a vowel: "My hat," "Mine eyes."

Now once you have all this *you/thou* business straight in your mind, you'll find it brings a new understanding when you're reading Shakespeare or any other literature from the times. Suddenly the relationships between the characters are more distinctly drawn. Here is a nice example.

QUEEN: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended. *(She is his queen—superior in rank—and also his mother.)*

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended. *(He is her son. He is also being very angry and formal with her.)*

QUEEN: Come, come, you answer with a wicked tongue. *(Now she's angry, too, so she becomes stiffly formal.)*

Through the rest of the highly emotional and violent scene that follows, the Queen wavers between coldly addressing Hamlet as *you* and tearfully addressing him as *thou*. Hamlet, however, always addresses her as *you*.

Notice also that Hamlet addresses the King quite respectfully as *you* until the end of the play, when he finds the King has poisoned his mother. Then it's "Thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane!"



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

You can also trace changing relationships between the characters by the different forms of address. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance: in the early parts of the play, when the Nurse still thinks of Juliet pretty much as her little girl, she says things to her like "Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed." But near the end of the play, by which time Juliet has taken a husband and begun acting like an imperious young noblewoman, the Nurse has switched to formal address: "Will you speak well of him that killed your husband?"

The more you read, the more examples you'll find, and the better you'll understand the *you/thou* difference. This is crucial in understanding your relationship to other people at the Faire, and in speaking to them—because our ultimate goal is to have you speaking Elizabethan English *to* someone else.

Now, what about "Ye"?

"Ye" is the plural of both *you* and *thou*. It's used when addressing a crowd of people, as in "Hear ye, hear ye," or "O come, all ye faithful." Occasionally, it's used as a sort of slang contraction for *you* or *thou*: "D'ye hear me?" or "I tell ye true."

Simple—right? But this tiny little word has a perfectly huge mistake often associated with it. "Ye" is not now, nor ever has been, synonymous with the word "the."

"But," you ask, "what about all those signs I see everywhere?" *Ye Olde Antique Shoppe? Ye King's Head Pub? Ye Little Olde Marriage Chapel in Ye Glen?*

The truth is that once, long before the invention of printing, there was one more letter in the alphabet than there is now. It was called *thorn* and it stood for the *th* sound. It looked a little like a tipped over letter y. When printing came along, printers used a symbol for *thorn* that looked even more like a y, and eventually it passed out of use and was forgotten. Forgotten, that is, until the Victorians (who wrote poorly-researched historical romances). They looked at old engravings, decided "ye" meant the same as "the" and used it as such. From this mistake comes the modern practice of sticking *Ye Olde* in front of nearly anything, for the "quaint" effect. They also pronounced it as "ye," but when you see it written as *Y-e*, you will henceforth pronounce it as *thorn-e*. Right?

We've taught you how Elizabethan English sounds. We've given you the building blocks of the language. Naturally, now you're ready to charge out into the streets, ready to deal with any sixteenth-century situation you encounter!

*What?* You'd like a little more advice still, a little friendly coaching?

Here are some hints, some little Pres-to-logs of information to fuel the dormant fire of your wit.

First of all, speak *slowly*. This is excellent advice to a beginner, for a number of reasons. After all, this is the sixteenth century: life itself moved slowly and people had more time to think about things. You'll make a nice dramatic contrast to your twentieth century visitor who speaks in quick, slurred shorthand, yknowhaddamean?

The other big advantage to speaking slowly is that it will give you time to think of something to say. If someone approaches you and asks a question you haven't any answer for, you don't have to blush and mutter "Gee, lady, I really don't know." Instead, you can scratch your head thoughtfully, squint at the sun, and *finally* say something like:

"Now, in good sooth, madam, I protest I know not...but that lad o'er yonder, now, belike he can tell you." (*Belike* translates as *maybe*.)

People may ask you questions for which they need quick answers. Don't make them wait all day. Have a little set of stock replies worked out for the questions people are most likely to ask you. *Be witty if you will, but the important thing is to be pleasant and informative.*

Here are some examples of the sort of thing you can do:

"The privies? Aye, sir, they be just down that lane and you turn left."



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

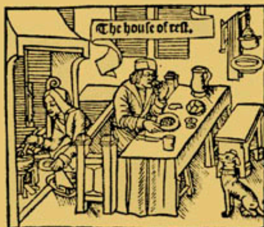
"The banger booth? Oh, aye, the fine pig sausages! To be sure, good lady, the man hath his stall over yonder, d'ye see where I point? Even there."

"*Telephones?* Be those the strange talking devices them Italians invented? Aye, we have them here. They be just up the hill, next to the potato-seller's stall."

"What time will the Queen be here today? Well, now (squint at the sun), I do make it half-past the hour of ten now, and I did hear the court and all the grand folk lay at Berkhamstead yesternight, so she hath a good ways to travel...I reckon Her Grace doth arrive at three of the clock today."

"Did I make my *costume* myself? Faith, sir: I know not *costume*—these be my clothes. But you wear wondrous fine rainment, now. Be you from the Indies, or belike far Cathay?"

"You think your ankle's sprained? Hold on, I'll get a first aid team for you right away." (That is our subtle way of telling you that you always drop character in an emergency situation.)



So there you are, crammed with all manner of useful information. You have been properly primed, catechised, and enriched with Things To Say.

Now—the ultimate lesson—we'll give you

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Twentieth century English is a dull, quiet, and unpoetic language. We are taught in school to write what we mean in as few words as possible, for the sake of clarity and precision. We speak the same way: we have to communicate quickly and efficiently, because we have so little time to talk to each other. We even learn to speak with streamlined exactitude: we have computers to program, after all.

The Elizabethans had far fewer reasons to rush about than we do. Certainly they had no television programs to hurry home to catch, and there weren't any stereo headsets to help them wile away the long winter evenings. What did they do with all those hours of spare time?

They read, for one thing. They were the first generation with widespread literacy and widespread availability of books. They also wrote, about every imaginable topic, from books on growing strawberries to amateur histories of the world.

And they talked. They socialized, crowded around tables in taverns, discussing politics and history and the latest gossip from the town over the hill. They sat in their homes or went to their neighbors' homes and compared notes on how their children were doing in school. They wondered how Goodman Smith managed to grow bigger pears than anyone else in the village, or why Master Eliot was absent from church three Sundays in a row. They compared what they'd heard in church: what this deacon, who was a Calvinist, had to say about salvation; as opposed to the last one, who had been a Lutheran. They couldn't have imagined a world where people lived shut away from one another, a world without talking.

So you shouldn't be too surprised to learn that one of the most admired qualities in anyone at this time was the capacity for good conversation. People enjoyed the company of someone with a "ready wit"—a person who could tell a funny story well, pass on the local news in an exciting way, and especially someone who had a talent with a well-turned phrase.

This went beyond polite conversation, too. In tavern brawls they were just as apt to pull out their weapons and kill each other as we are, but the opponent who came up with the most blazing, imaginative insults was usually judged the better man.

© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

Modern verbal abuse is pretty monotonous. A few four-letter words in various repeated combinations are all we seem capable of. But get a load of these examples of invective from Shakespeare's day:

Falstaff says, "Rogues, hence, avaunt! Vanish like hailstones, go! Trudge, plod away on th'hoof, seek shelter, pack!" and his henchman Pistol retorts: "Let vultures gripe thy guts!"

Here's Doctor Caius muttering threats: "I will teach a scurvy jackanapes priest to meddle or make...by gar, I will cut all his two stones. By gar, he shall not have a stone to throw at his dog!"

Or there are miscellaneous insults.

*To a constable:* "You blue-bottle rogue, you filthy famished correctioner, you starved bloodhound."

*To a fat man:* "Thou globe of sinful continents."

*Or just in general:* "You poor, base, rascally, cheating, lack-linen mate!" "You bottle-ale rascal!"

"Away, you scullion! You rampallion! You fustalarion!"

"Standest thou there the lyingest knave in Christendom."

"Thou art a boil, a plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle."

"Whoreson cullionly barbermonger!"

And the all-time classic, never better expressed than here: "Thou art...the son and heir of a mongrel bitch!"

Swearing—not insult or abuse, but actual oaths to lend force to one's speech—was widely practised. Men swore by:

- *God's death* (Referring to Christ's death on the cross)
- *God's wounds* (As we explained)
- *God's teeth*
- Other parts of God's anatomy.

Or they swore by the ancient Roman gods and mythic characters, not by the Greek ones. (The English at this time considered the Romans to have

been nobler than the Greeks.) They also popularly believed they were descended from the noble Romans, thanks to some imaginative history written by Geoffrey of Monmouth. There wasn't any other pagan stuff.

Men swore also by their beards, by their swords, by their honors—all that "macho" stuff—or by the tools of their trades, if they were commoners. A smith might swear "By my hammer and tongs!"

Men *and* women could swear by the saints, especially their patron saints. The saint they invoked might depend on the circumstances of the conversation. A pious soldier speaking of the wars might exclaim, "Now, by Saint Michael!" (St. Michael being the patron saint of soldiers.) A bearkeeper or animal trainer might exclaim, "By Saint Ursula!" Because her name sounded like the Latin word for bear, she became the patron saint of men who worked with bears.

If people were watching archers at a contest, they might exclaim "Now, by Saint Sebastian!" because he was martyred by arrows. Hunt up a copy of *Lives of the Saints* and dig out some useful saints and attributes to swear by.

Women did not swear as much; their oaths were fairly mild. A woman might swear by her honor as well, or perhaps by her modesty, chastity, or maidenhead. (If your character is obviously lacking



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

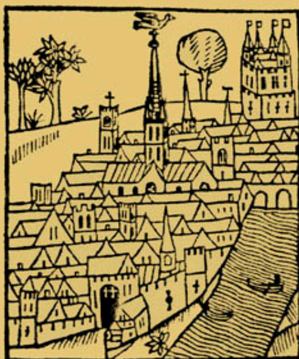
in one or all of these, such an oath can be used to very funny effect.) The same would go for a man obviously lacking in beard, sword, or bravery.

Violent as their language could be in anger, or colorful as it was in surprise, the Elizabethans also outdid us in terms of affections. Here are some samples of things they said when they wanted to charm:

> *Run through fire I would, for thy sweet sake!*
> *Kate like the hazel-twig is straight and slender, and as brown in hue as hazelnuts and sweeter than the kernels.*
> *Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow.*
> *O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear: Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.*
> *Swear by thy gracious self, which is the god of my idolatry, and I'll believe thee.*

Terms of affections included such classics as *my love, my darling,* and *my dear;* however, "honey," as we use it now, is not correct—and neither is "baby" or "sugar."

But you can use *sweetin'* or *sweetheart,* or *sweetest heart's love, dearer to me than life,* or anything more elaborate.



The idea you should be drawing from all this is not that the people of Elizabeth's time used different words: they used *more* words. They loved their language. Everyone was an amateur poet when it came to speech. They threw in colorful words like big handfuls of sequins; they festooned their verbal exchanges with gaudy expressions. Unlearn all you learned in English I about tight, concise writing. You're in Chipping-under-Oakwood now, and you can be as gloriously florid as you want.

And, here to help you is a vocabulary list of some of the choicer Elizabethan words.

*Atomy*—An elf, literally, but used as an insult to a short person.
*Dampnified*—Depressed; sad
*Prating*—Babbling; talking too much
*Cutpurse*—Thief
*Carouse*—Party down!
*Divers*—Various
*Perchance*—Maybe (Also *belike*)
*Chide*—Scold, nag
*Pantaloon*—Silly old man
*Cupshot*—Drunk
*Antic*—Bizarre, crazy
*Curious*—Intricate and detailed
*Whoreson*—This widely-used word meant, literally, "Son of a Whore," but wasn't used that way strictly. It was an insult when used directly, but seems to have been used mostly for mild emphasis, the way we'd use "Darned." *(This whoreson cup!)*

*Tosspot*—Drunkard
*Coz*—Short for *cousin,* a friendly word of address for anyone you're close to, blood relation or not. It isn't to be confused with
*Cozener*—Con artist, trickster.
*Rudesby*—Oaf, boor
*Scurvy*—Wretched
*Perdy*—Indeed; for sure
*Forswear*—To lie or cheat
*Physic*—Medicine or cure
*Malapert*—Rude or impudent
*Leman*—Sounds nasty, doesn't it? But all it means is *girlfriend.*
*Ere*—Before
*Curst*—Vicious; sharp-tongued
*Catechise*—Teach



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

*Betimes*—Very early in the morning
*Bawcock*—Fine lusty fellow
*Recreant*—Coward, traitor
*Plume-pluck*—To humble or humiliate
*Hap*—Fortune or luck
*Haply*—Hopefully, with any luck
*High-stomached*—Haughty
*Glistering*—Shining
*Choler*—Wrath
*Cormorant*—Glutton
*Nonpariel*—A beauty
*Certes*—Another word meaning "for sure"

This is only a sampling. More can be found if you study the writing of the period, which we will urgently advise you to do in our

## CONCLUDING NOTES AND MOTHERLY ADVICE

Previous vocabulary efforts have given the impression that most of Elizabethan conversation consisted of insulting or propositioning one another. Mind you, it was a fine language for these purposes; and if you want to specialize in either of these pastimes you can consult *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, a book by Eric Partridge. It goes in and out of print, but a good library should have a copy.

For the other topics of speech, however, you don't have to look very far. Sixteenth-century lives weren't all that different from your own. Translate your own day-to-day experiences into an Elizabethan framework and use it as the basis of a conversation, like this:

"Faith, Jack: where hast thou been? Thou wast to have been up betimes!" *(Wow, Jack, where have you been? I thought you were gonna get here early!)*

"Aye, even so. My good grey mare threw a shoe upon the road; naught could I do but lead her to the smithy in Padstowe, some seven miles off." *(Yeah, but I had a flat tire and no spare. I had to hitchhike to the Pep Boys in Buttonwillow, of all places.)*

"By St. Christopher, t'is ill luck." *(Yeah, bummer.)*

"Too true, alack. Hast supped? I fear me thy trenchers be bare." *(You're telling me. Is there any food left? I'll bet you guys ate it all.)*

"Nay, in good sooth; we kept a cold partridge wing and a tankard of small ale against thou shouldst arrive." *(No, as a matter of fact. We saved you some pizza and a Budweiser.)*

With a little imagination and practice you can translate just about any situation into sixteenth-century terminology. Not only is it useful exercise, it's *fun!*

Now we're going to turn you loose with a recommended reading list, most of which consists of one name: *Shakespeare*, that great and powerful wizard of words, Will Shakespeare himself. Read anything you can find by Shakespeare, but in particular study the language of his common people: the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (and in fact all the servants in that play); Bottom and the other laborers in *Midsummer Night's Dream*; the gravedigger in *Hamlet*.

And Shakespeare's best play of all (for our purposes) is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

It's not about ancient Romans or Italian noblemen or princes of Denmark. It's about ordinary English people living in a little country town, about the year 1574. They're all excited because the Court is staying at nearby Windsor Castle! Meanwhile life goes on as usual: servants gossip, housewives worry about their children, young lovers sneak off to woo, the village doctor has



© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

gotten into a quarrel with the village schoolmaster; and at the village tavern a certain fat and disreputable old knight is wracking his brains for a way to pay his bar bill.

Nearly any character you could wish to play at Faire is here: simple countrymen, honest merchants, fops and fools, liars and rogues, wise and witty ladies, servants and noblemen. Each is drawn in detail for your study, each one with her or his own distinctive way of speaking. You'll find it incredibly useful. It's also a funny play, full of practical jokes.

Interestingly, Victorian scholars and critics turned up their noses at *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, distressed that the Noble Bard could write something as un-lofty as a popular farce. But audiences have always loved it—which shows perhaps there are more Falstaffs and Mistress Quicklys in the world than Hamlets and Julius Caesars. *Amen*, we cry . . .

Here are some other books you'll find useful:

*The Portable Elizabethan Reader* published by Viking Portable Library;

The King James Version of the *Bible;*

*English Life in Tudor Times*, by Roger Hart;

*Shakespeare of London*, by Marchette Chute;

*A Visual Guide to Shakespeare's Life and Times*, by Louis B. Wright and Elaine Fowler;

*The England of Elizabeth* by A.L. Rowse;

*Lost Country Life* by Dorothy Hartlett.

Some of these will broaden your use of the language; others will give you a wider frame of reference on the times and the people.

## CONCLUSION

So with this we shall conclude, trusting thou art now properly catechis'd; thy tongues are apt to speak and thy wits apter to shine than gold new-minted. Go thou, therefore, unto the lanes of Chipping-under-Oakwood and delight the ears of all that shall hear thee. Then shall we be well repaid for the labor we have had with thee.

Take pains: be perfect.

Thy loving friends,
*Mother Bombey and Mother Drum*

© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.

Did you know that each time you are a part of the Renaissance Pleasure Faire you participate in a once-in-a-lifetime experience? This piece of the past is brought to life differently each day. It is a unique art form consisting of both scripted scenes and hundreds of improvisational performances on stages and in the streets. Two thousand "performers" study Elizabethan as a Second Language, techniques of improvisation. country dance, song, and costume to become - for these few Brigadoon days - re-created residents of an Elizabethan village.

Through the medium of The Renaissance Pleasure Faire, the Living History Centre brings to life the common folk and the not-so-common folk of times gone by. As Shakespeare says, "We trick into learning with a laugh."

*We are pleased that thousands have found history to be an exciting hobby.*

*We are proud to have been a part of the revitalization of handmade crafts.*

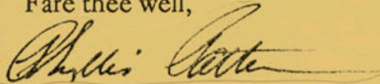
*We delight to sharing with you the spirit of ancient traditions both springtime and harvest.*

Folk rituals arouse in us the memories of simpler times more in harmony with nature and the world.

People celebrations and folk traditions have a living and meaningful role in our lives today.

Won't you join us in this twentieth-century Renaissance?

Fare thee well,



Phyllis Patterson
President
Living History Centre

The Living History Centre © 1989
© The Living History Centre. All rights reserved.