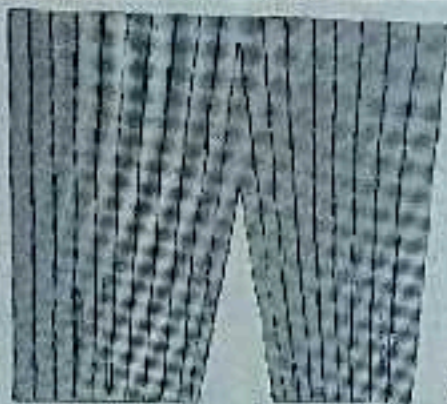




A concise dictionary of

**ENGLISH
SLANG**



Brian Phythian



*A Concise Dictionary of
English Slang
and Colloquialisms*

B. A. Phythian



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Slang is a very elusive element in human communication. It enters the language from a wide variety of sources, often from closely-knit communities such as the armed forces or cockney culture; as time has passed, the many other countries where English is native have added their own contributions to the store of slang, as they have enriched Standard English, helping to make it one of the most complex and developing of the world's languages. Sometimes the new slang, like the old, drops out of use, quickly or gradually. Where it remains, it may remain as slang, temporarily or for centuries, or it may develop into something else at varying speeds. The normal development is for a slang expression to become accepted into that large body of more 'educated' but still informal English known as colloquialism, and thence into the full status of Standard English — which can be most briefly defined as those words and expressions not classified as 'slang' or 'colloquialism' in the standard dictionaries. The reader seeking fuller guidance about the nature of these various categories of language is referred to Eric Partridge's invaluable *Usage and Abusage*.

It may be seen, then, that at any one time it can be extremely difficult to determine the exact status of a word or expression, because language is alive and changing, and slang is one of its most volatile components. This is especially true in our own century, when the cinema, newspapers and television have made language more accessible, and carried it from continent to continent more quickly than ever before. An additional problem is presented by the fact that words often used by dictionary-makers when defining categories of language — words such as 'formal', 'educated', 'accepted' — are themselves even less clear-cut now than they used to be. In 1970, the word 'telly' was stigmatised as 'non-cultured' by the standard *Dictionary of Slang*; in 1973 it was used by the Archbishop of Canterbury during a televised broadcast from Westminster Abbey on the eve of a royal wedding.

For the purposes of this volume, I have taken the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as a generally handy guide to Standard English, and have excluded all words which are recorded there except those specifically classified as slang or colloquialism, and a few others I felt ought to have been. In struggling to reduce the remaining body of language to proportions which could reasonably be called 'concise', I have been guided by three criteria: firstly, slang has been emphasised at the expense of colloquialism, because the former is less frequently recorded in generally available form; secondly, I have tried to confine myself

Language is alive and always changing, and slang, one of its most volatile elements, is a very elusive part of human communication. It may drop out of use gradually or quickly, or it may become accepted into standard English. In this work the author has confined himself to current usage, and has avoided the area of more formal and standard colloquialism included in the companion volume *A Concise Dictionary of English Idioms*.

The book will provide an invaluable and colourful insight into contemporary English for students or general readers.

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