

Why do we say that?

Ever wonder where some of our sayings come from? I have a few which I will explain.

During the early years, beds were feather mattresses. A series of ropes was strung between the bed frames. Periodically these ropes would stretch letting the mattress and occupant sink close to the floor, so the ropes were adjusted to take up the slack, Hence the saying "Good night, sleep tight"

Sailing battle ships were equipped with cannons. The cannon balls were stored on rolling carts called monkeys, they were made of brass to resist corrosion caused by salt water. In extreme cold weather, the brass shrunk so much it disturbed the balance of the cannon balls, causing them to fall off. Thus the saying, "So cold it would freeze the balls off a brass monkey."

In England's pubs, ale was served in pints and quarts. If your drinking caused you to become a bit rowdy, you would be reminded to "Mind your P's and Q's."

Most every county fair had a greased pig contest. If you were fortunate enough to capture this slippery beast, you got to "Bring home the bacon."

When visitors came to your house, you would have cured bacon hanging which you and your friends would carve off a piece, then set and "chew the fat."

In England, small nation that it is, there are issues with burial grounds in grave yards being full. They decided that after 20 years, graves would be dug up and put the bones in a community bone house. Many of the coffins they dug up had scratches and marks inside making them realize they had buried the people alive. They decided to attach a string to the bodies wrist and lead it up from the grave and attach it to a bell. People were stationed in the graveyard night and day to listen for the bell. If you were there at night you worked" the graveyard shift. " You were either "saved by the bell" or were a "Dead ringer"

In 1921, coal miners were mostly unionized. Many areas refused to allow any talk of unionization and went as far as murder backers of union ideals. A small area of West Virginia was the last hold out against the union. The miners in that area wanted the union but the owners were opposed to paying union wages and working union hours. Many violent actions were overlooked by the law as the owners had hired the law enforcement officers and thugs to keep the union at bay. The union miners took up arms to repel the violent owners by fighting fire with fire. This thousand or so miners made up and drill as an army to fight for their non-union brothers. To identify themselves they tied handkerchiefs around their necks and were deemed "Rednecks"

In early times, the wealthy had homes with slate or marble floors, middle class had wooden floors, the less fortunate had earthen floors and were quickly identified as "Dirt Poor"

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, family got the middle and only guests of elite got the “Upper crust”

In the 19th century, the solution used to treat felt hats caused chronic mercury poisoning in the craftsmen making hats. It caused them to tremble, mix up their words, and act irrationally. Thus the expression, “mad as a hatter”

Hijackers were originally people who robbed American bootleggers of their illegal booze. It is believed the word came from the robbers phrase of “Stick em up high, Jack”

Irish pubs had mugs with whistles on the handles, If your mug was dry you would blow the whistle and the barmaid would come and ,”wet your whistle”

I can not confirm all these descriptions as fact but have found duplicated descriptions of the affore mentioned in multiple places. If none or all are true, it at least gives some explanation of how they came to be phrases and a part of every day language.

Presented September 29, 2010 by V. B. Richard L. Boitnott