25 WORDS THAT YOU DIDN’T KNOW YOU NEED TO KNOW

Every age has its own language and its favourite words. Time and the fickleness of human communication often consigns many perfectly good, usable words to obscurity. This list resurrects 25 such words, most of them slang or pithy insults from a past age.

Browse and enjoy. You may find a few words you want to add to your vocabulary, as the perfect term to describe something or someone or to add colour to your language.

1. Cross-crib: A family home (1812) but later used to mean a thieves’ den (1859 and later) At that point, a law-abiding home was called a square crib.
2. Do-ray-me (1933): Cash money
3. Doctors (1525): false or crooked dice. There are many historical terms for these but this is one of the earliest I found.
4. Dr. Jenkins (1920s): A dangerous person. Also called Dr. Mathews.
5. Drag cove (1812): a cart driver, also called a drayman. Could be applied to a taxi driver? A drag lay (1777) is theft from a vehicle
6. Fade (1918-1930): To leave or run away or escape
7. Fluff (1934): A gangster’s girl or mistress. Similar: Flossie (1940s) is a prostitute; Floozey (1909-1933) a dissipated woman or one of questionable virtue
8. Flunkey-Graft (1926): Menial work. In 1910, a flunkey was a name for a tramp’s camp
9. Flymy (1859): Adjective, indicating someone who is knowing, cunning, and roguish
10. Fox (1870): to befuddle someone or stealthily steal from someone (1800s to early 1900s). Also ‘Fox the Cull’ (1880) which would be an order to steal from someone.
11. Get hunk (1870): to retaliate or get even
12. Gezumph (1932) and Gezumpher: The first is a swindle/con, the second is the conman
13. Gink (1911): a guy or man, often in plural as ‘ginks” to described a group.
14. Grifter (1914): a commercial swindler or someone who short-changes customers
15. Grogham (1781: a horse. Also four-runner (1870-1905)
16. Gully (1912): A liar To gully is to tell a lie.
17. Gumshoe (1924): verb – to sneak about. Also used as a noun for private detective.
18. Hell Dust (1934) – narcotic. Also Dr. White (1920s)
19. Hickjop (1801): A fool (see also bumpkin and dolt)
20. Hicksius Doxins (1635) – a conman or trickster or juggler
21. High Monkey-monk (1901): the president or chief or overseer
22. Sky-Piece (early 20th C): a hat
23. Sob-stiff (1925): A professional beggar
24. Sparkle (1879 – 1920s): a diamond or jewellery
25. Squaller (1872): A baby or young child