

PART III: VOCABULARIES

Factoid: In 1604, the year after Elizabeth's death, the first English dictionary, "A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words," was published by Robert Cawdray. Even that was not a dictionary as we understand it, but rather a collection of "difficult" words to learn for those who wanted to seem more educated than they actually were.

It would be impossible for a book of this small scope to set forth a complete Elizabethan vocabulary, when numerous volumes have been filled with Shakespeare's words alone. Instead, this second half of the book will focus on useful words and phrases, in particular with an eye to the reenactor's needs at a Renaissance Faire.

In reading these vocabularies, it's important to remember a few things. First, just because a familiar word is given here with a different meaning, doesn't mean the modern meaning was also unknown. I am listing only obsolete or obscure meanings for these words.

Second, you should NOT take the spellings given as the only "correct" spellings. As mentioned before, spelling was highly variable and individualized. The spelling given for a word here represents only one or two spellings that I have found in my researches; many words could easily list four or more spellings -- and all are equally "correct," as there was no standard.

Rather than presenting this lexicon as one big list, they are classified by meaning into various specialized groups. Many of the words are presented with sample phrases to make the usage clear. I hope this organization will make the section much faster and easier to use.

This section begins with a few words deserving of special discussion, a little more depth than the regular lists.

The first regular vocabulary list is, "One hundred useful words for reenactors." I highly recommend that you learn the words in this list, because they are selected specifically to ease communication at a Renaissance Faire. This is followed by, "Fifty useful phrases for reenactors," which is exactly what it says. There is some degree of overlap between the phrases offered and the words presented in various vocabularies; this is to be expected.

After this come the specialized vocabularies: words for people, food and drink, clothing and textiles, exclamations and expletives. There follows a general glossary of words not covered in the specialized vocabularies, and then a reverse phrasebook giving Elizabethan equivalents for some modern phrases. The last list, and mercifully the shortest, is a list of phrases specifically to be avoided.

As with the rest of the book, I recommend that you read the words **aloud**. Try them on your tongue, and take the time to get the sound right. Then try to inject them into your speech where they might be appropriate. This will change them from strangers to familiar friends.