WORD ORIGINS

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INTRODUCTION

The average English speaker knows around 50,000 words. That represents an astonishing diversity – nearly 25 times more words than there are individual stars visible to the naked eye in the night sky. And even 50,000 seems insignificant beside the half a million recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. But looked at from an historical perspective, that diversity becomes more apparent than real. Tracing a word's development back in time shows that in many cases what are now separate lexical terms were formerly one and the same word. The deep prehistory of our language has nurtured little word-seeds that over the millennia have proliferated into widely differentiated families of vocabulary.

The purpose of this book is to uncover the often surprising connections between elements of the English lexicon that have become obscured by centuries of language change – the links in our word-web that join such unlikely partners as, for instance, *beef* and *cow*, *bacteria* and *imbecile*, and *bishop* and *spy*.

The origins of the English language

The life stories of individual words, often mazy and conjectural, need a fixed backdrop if they are to make sense. So first, a little history. English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages. The precise origins of this are still a matter of some controversy, but the consensus view is that it came on the scene around 8,000 years ago in the general area to the north of the Black Sea. Since then it has split up into a large number of subgroups, which today provide nearly all the languages of Europe and have also spread over large areas of the Middle East and northern India. Among them are the Indo-Iranian languages, including Hindi and ancient Sanskrit; the Slavic languages – Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbo-Croat, and so on; the Baltic languages, Latvian and Lithuanian (which of all these modern languages most closely resembles its Indo-European ancestor); the Celtic languages, such as Welsh, Gaelic, and Breton; and Greek.

But in the history of English, there are two particular groups that are of central importance. The first is the Romance languages: classical Latin, the literary language of ancient Rome; and French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian, which evolved from Vulgar Latin, the language of the common people that spread through the Western Roman Empire. The role of Latin and French, in particular, in the growth of English vocabulary has been immense. We acquired a sizeable portion of our words from one or other of these sources.

The second important group, of course, is the Germanic languages: for that is the group to which English itself belongs. The existence of the Germanic peoples as a separate speech community dates back at least 3,000 years. Their first northern European home has been traced to an area around the river Elbe. At this time they all spoke the same language, which is generally known as Common Germanic. Around the 2nd century BC this began to split up into three distinct dialects. One was East Germanic. The only East Germanic language of which any written evidence survives is Gothic. Now extinct, it was spoken by Germanic peoples who migrated back eastwards to the area of modern Bulgaria and the Crimea. It provides us with our closest glimpse of what prehistoric Common Germanic must have been like. The second was North Germanic, which has evolved into modern

Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic. And lastly there was West Germanic, the ancestor of modern German, Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, and English.

The forerunners of English crossed the Channel in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. They were brought by peoples from the northeastern corner of the European mainland, around Jutland and southern Denmark – the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. They spoke a mutually intelligible set of Germanic dialects (whose closest modern continental relative is Frisian), which formed the basis of what is now known as Old English (the alternative term 'Anglo-Saxon' is no longer much used). This was a more or less homogeneous language, but with marked geographical differences reflecting the areas into which the various Germanic peoples had moved: the Angles into the Midlands (where Mercian was spoken) and the North (whose form of Old English is now called Northumbrian); the Jutes into Kent; and the Saxons into the rest of southern and western England (their speech is known as West Saxon).

Astonishing richness and diversity

The end of the Old English period is conventionally associated with the Norman Conquest of 1066, but in practice of course the transition into the next historical phase of the language, which we term Middle English, was a gradual process. Its crucial feature from the point of view of vocabulary was the beginning of importation of non-native words which over the centuries have transformed English from a parochial northeast European dialect into a lexical tapestry of astonishing richness and diversity. A smattering of Latin words entered the language following the conversion of the English to Christianity in the 7th century, but it was the Vikings who first introduced new ingredients to the lexical blend in a big way. Their forays began in the mid-8th century and lasted for several hundred years. Their impact on English was greatest in northern areas, where they settled, but the language as a whole is indebted to Old Norse for such basic words as *anger*, *egg*, *knife*, *law*, and *leg*.

Undoubtedly the single most significant event in the history of the English language was the Norman invasion of 1066, for it provided the impetus for a huge influx of vocabulary from across the English Channel. These new words came both via Anglo-Norman, the dialect of Old French spoken in England by the new ruling classes, which was based on the northern variety of French; and direct from Old French itself. It was this lexical infusion, which lasted from the 11th to the 16th centuries, which truly laid the basis for the hybrid English language of today. It would be futile to try and give a representative sample of the words it introduced, for they are so all-pervasive. From *supper* to *justice*, from *action* to *money*, from *village* to *receive*, they came in their thousands. Some were Gaulish in ultimate origin. Gaulish was the Celtic language spoken in what is now France before French killed it off. But the greatest majority of these French imports were descended from earlier Latin ancestors.

It was Latin itself, together with Greek, that formed the next wave of lexical innovation in English. With the Renaissance came a revival in classical scholarship, and in the 16th and 17th centuries hundreds of Latin and Greek words were naturalized into English – among them *apparatus*, *area*, *crisis*, *maximum*, *poem*, and *pollen*, to name no more than a minute fraction.

Expanding horizons

It was around this time that English started to roam beyond its historical boundaries. As English merchant venturers sailed the world, not only did they take their language with them to distant continents, where it has since become in many cases the dominant form of speech, but they also brought back with them new and exotic terms that have found their way into the English lexicon. There is not a major language in the world that has not over the past 500 years made some contribution to English, from the beautiful donations of Italian (*aria*, *arcade*, *bandit*, *bust*, *escort*, *frigate*, *granite*, *madrigal*, *pedal*, *solo*, *umbrella*, etc) and Hindi (*bungalow*, *chintz*, *cot*, *juggernaut*, *pundit*, *shampoo*, etc) to the more modest gifts from the likes of Finnish (*sauna*) and Tibetan (*lama*).

English is still growing – faster probably now than at any previous time in its history (it has been calculated that around 800 neologisms are added to the working vocabulary of the language every year). Over half of the new items come from combinations of old ones, but there continues to be a lot of borrowing from other languages (*glasnost* and *perestroika* are notable examples from the 1980s). The formation of blends (conflations of existing words, such as *motel* formed from *motor* and *hotel*) and acronyms (words made up from initial letters, like *yuppie* – a *y*oung *u*rban *p*rofessional) is characteristic of late 20th-century English.

Unlikely relatives

All down these centuries of evolution and acquisition runs a complex tracery of descent – often muddled, interrupted, cancelling itself out or losing itself in dead ends, but often too presenting us with breathtaking lexical fragmentation patterns that link the unlikeliest of partners. It seems scarcely plausible, for instance, that *acrobat* and *oxygen* should be related, but they are. Both go back ultimately to an Indo-European base **ak-*, which conveyed the notion of being 'pointed' or 'sharp'. An *acrobat* is etymologically someone who walks on the 'points' of the feet, or on tiptoe (it is based on Greek *ákros* 'terminal', 'topmost'), while *oxygen* means literally 'acid-producer'. It comes from Greek *oxús* 'sharp, acid', which in turn was descended from **ak-*. Nor is this by any means the end of the story. For the same base is responsible for a wide range of other English words, including *acacia*, *acid*, *acme*, *acne*, *acrid*, *acute*, *eager*, *ear* (of corn), *edge*, and *vinegar*. Despite their common source, they have reached English along very different routes. *Ear* and *edge*, for example, come in a line of direct descent from Indo-European through Germanic, while *eager* came via Old French from Latin, and *acrobat* and *oxygen*, as we have seen, go back to Greek.

This family of English words traces its history right back to the prehistoric roots of the language, but such extreme antiquity is not a precondition for great diversity. The Latin word *gradus* 'step', for instance, lies behind an enormous range of English vocabulary, much of it formed by prefixation: *aggression*, for example, *congress*, *degrade*, *degree*, *digress*, *egress*, *ingredient*, *ingress*, *progress*, *regress*, *retrograde*, and *transgress*, not to mention *grade*, *gradation*, *gradient*, *gradual*, and *graduate*. And even more prolific source has been Latin *cēdere* 'go, go away, give up', which has given English *accede*, *ancestor*, *cease*, *cede*, *concede*, *exceed*, *intercede*, *precede*, *proceed*, *recede*, and *succeed*, plus a range of related nouns such as *concession* and *procession*.

How to use this book

The aim of this dictionary is to bring out and make explicit these sorts of historical connection between English words. It is arranged alphabetically, so that each article deals in the first instance with the origin and development of a particular word. But where appropriate the relationship of

that word with other English words is described, and for quick reference a list is provided (preceded by ➧) of the words which are etymologically linked with the entry word. All the words whose story is told in the dictionary are shown with a date after them in square brackets. This denotes the century in which they are first recorded in English. Thus cock-a-hoop [16] indicates that *cock-a-hoop* probably entered the language in the 16th century (words that date back to the Old English period are marked simply [OE]). If, in the article about a given word, a related word is mentioned but no date is shown for it, this means that the related word has its own article, so you should look there for further information.

In all about 8,000 words have their stories told here. They represent the central core of English vocabulary, plus an extensive selection of words included either because their etymology is intrinsically interesting, or because they form part of a wider lexical family. It is far from being an exhaustive account of the entire English lexicon, of course, for it is not part of the book's purpose to give it a complete list of the (all too many) English words whose origins are not known for certain.

In terms of sheer numbers of years, at least half of the period which *Word Origins* covers predates the emergence of writing in the West, and so much of the material in it – Indo-European forms, for instance, and prehistoric Germanic words – is not recorded from contemporary sources. That we know so much about it is due to the work of historical linguists, who have reconstructed these ancient words and word-parts from the evidence of later written sources and of the modern descendants of these prehistoric languages. It is conventional to mark such reconstructions with an asterisk, and that is what is done here. So for example the prehistoric Germanic ancestor of English *chicken* is given as *kiukīnam. This means that we have no direct evidence of a word kiukīnam, but that *chicken* itself and its relatives in other Germanic languages, together with our knowledge of how Germanic words evolved, have enabled us to postulate its existence.

It is now fifteen years since the publication of the first edition of this dictionary. That is a mere passing moment in the geological time-scale of the English language's evolution. Enough, though, to warrant some modifications to the original. A few of the entries that in 1990 were most topical (for instance, *perestroika*) no longer seem so urgently relevant, and have been dispensed with, and new discoveries about the history of our vocabulary have necessitated changes too (see, for example, the entry for *marzipan*). Not least, over a hundred completely new entries have been added to this edition, which thus probes more deeply than ever into the hidden crevices of our language. Another innovation is a set of lexical family trees, which enable the user to explore visually the complex historical relationships of a representative number of English words.

Language names

The language names used in this book are for the most part self-explanatory, but there are some pre-modern ones that may be unfamiliar. The more commonly used ones are elucidated here:

Sanskrit	The ancient Indo-European language of northern South Asia. Its earliest known form, Vedic Sanskrit (the language of the Vedas, ancient hymns), is documented from c. 1000 BC. By the 4th century BC Vedic Sanskrit had been succeeded by classical Sanskrit.
Greek	Without further qualification, "Greek" refers to ancient Greek, as spoken between c. 1500 BC and 500 AD. The present-day language is specified as "modern Greek" (this is traditionally dated from 1453, the year of the fall of Byzantium). The language of the intervening period is generally termed "Byzantine Greek" or "medieval Greek".
Latin	Without further qualification, "Latin" refers to classical Latin, the literary language of ancient Rome between the 1st

	century BC and the 3rd century AD.
Late Latin	The successor to classical Latin, extant from the 3rd century AD to the 7th century.
Medieval Latin	The Latin in use in Western Europe from the 7th century to the 15th.
Vulgar Latin	The spoken language in use in the Western Roman Empire, which evolved into the modern Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, etc.). There are no records of it as a written language, and the Vulgar Latin words quoted in this dictionary are reconstructed forms.
Gallo-Roman	The intermediate stage between Vulgar Latin and Old French, spoken between the 7th century and the 10th.
Old French	The ancestor of modern French, spoken between the 10th century and c. 1600.
Old Northern French	The form of Old French spoken in Northern France, which the Norman conquerors of England brought with them. Most of English's early acquisitions would have been from this variety of Old French, but in this dictionary it is generally not specified unless an explicit contrast is being made with the more southerly, "central" Old French.
Anglo-Norman	The form of French spoken in England in the Middle Ages.
Gaulish	The Celtic language spoken in Gaul, the ancient region of Europe centred on what is now France.
Frankish	The language spoken by the Franks, the Germanic people who conquered Gaul in the 6th century AD.
Old Norse	The ancestor of the modern Scandinavian languages, spoken throughout Scandinavia from c. 700 to c. 1350.
Old English [OE]	Spoken from the mid-5th century to c. 1150.
Middle English	Spoken from c. 1150 to c. 1500.
Modern English	Spoken from c. 1500 to the present day.
High German	Originally, the form of German spoken in southern Germany, which has evolved into modern standard German.
Old High German	Spoken up to c. 1200.
Middle High German	Spoken from c. 1200 to c. 1500.
Low German	German dialects spoken in northern Germany.
Middle Low German	Spoken from c. 1200 to c. 1500. Its forerunner is known as "Old Saxon".
Middle Dutch	The precursor of modern Dutch, spoken between c. 1100 and the early 16th century.
Old Church Slavonic *or* Old Slavonic	The earliest written Slavonic language (actually a dialect of Bulgarian), first recorded in the 9th century. It is still used in religious services in the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The scope of the terms 'Indo-European' and 'Common Germanic' (together with its descendants 'East Germanic', 'North Germanic' and 'West Germanic') is described in the Introduction.

A

a, an [OE] The indefinite article in English is ultimately identical with the word *one* (as is the case, even more obviously, in other European languages – French *un*, German *ein*, and so on). The ancestor of both *a(n)* and *one* was *ān*, with a long vowel, but in the Old English period it was chiefly used for the numeral; where we would use *a(n)*, the Anglo-Saxons tended not to use an article at all. *An* begins to emerge as the indefinite article in the middle of the 12th century, and it was not long before, in that relatively unemphatic linguistic environment, its vowel became weakened and shortened, giving *an*. And at about the same time the distinction between *an* and *a* began to develop, although this was a slow process; until 1300 *an* was still often used before consonants, and right up to 1600 and beyond it was common before all words beginning with *h*, such as *house*.

➧ ONE

aardvark see EARTH, FARROW

abacus [17] *Abacus* comes originally from a Hebrew word for 'dust', *'ābāq*. This was borrowed into Greek with the sense of 'drawing board covered with dust or sand', on which one could draw for, among other purposes, making mathematical calculations. The Greek word, *ábax*, subsequently developed various other meanings, including 'table', both in the literal sense and as a mathematical table. But it was as a 'dust-covered board' that its Latin descendant, *abacus*, was first used in English, in the 14th century. It was not until the 17th century that the more general sense of a counting board or frame came into use, and the more specific 'counting frame with movable balls' is later still.

abandon [14] The Old French verb *abandoner* is the source of *abandon*. It was based on *a bandon*, meaning literally 'under control or jurisdiction', which was used in the phrase *mettre a bandon* 'put someone under someone else's control' – hence 'abandon them'. The word *bandon* came, in altered form, from Latin *bannum* 'proclamation', which is circuitously related to English *banns* 'proclamation of marriage' and is an ancestor of *contraband*.

➧ BANNS, CONTRABAND

abash [14] *Abash* shares a common ancestry with *abeyance* [16], although the latter underwent an about-turn in meaning in the 17th century which disguises their relationship. They go back to a Latin verb *batāre*, meaning 'yawn' or 'gape'. This was borrowed into French as *baer*, later *bayer* (it was the source of English *bay* 'recessed space'). The addition of the prefix *es-* (from Latin *ex-*) produced *esbaer*, later *e(s)bahir* 'gape with astonishment', whence, via the present stem *e(s)bass-*, came English *abash*, which originally meant 'stand amazed' as well as 'embarrass, discomfit'. (*Bashful* is a 16th-century derivative, with elision of the *a-*, which was first used by the dramatist Nicholas Udall.) Addition of the prefix *a-* to Old French *baer*, meanwhile, had given *abaer* 'aspire after', and its noun *abeance* 'aspiration, desire'. In legal terminology, this word was used in French for the condition of a person in expectation or hope of receiving property, but in English the focus quickly became reversed to the property, and its condition of being temporarily without an

owner.

ABEYANCE, BASHFUL

abbot [OE] *Abbot* comes ultimately from *abbā*, a Syriac word meaning 'father' (which itself achieved some currency in English, particularly in reminiscence of its biblical use: 'And he said, Abba, father, all things are possible unto thee', Mark 14:36). This came into Greek as *abbás*, and thence, via the Latin accusative *abbatem*, into Old English as *abbud* or *abbod*. The French term *abbé* (which is much less specific in meaning than English *abbot*) comes from the same source. In much the same way as *father* is used in modern English for priests, *abba* was widely current in the East for referring to monks, and hence its eventual application to the head of a monastery. A derivative of Latin *abbatem* was *abbatia*, which has given English both *abbacy* [15] and (via Old French *abbeie*) *abbey* [13]. *Abbess* is of similar antiquity (Latin had *abbatissa*).

ABBESS, ABBEY

abbreviate see BRIEF

abdicate see INDICATE

abet see BAIT

abhor [15] *Abhor* comes from Latin *abhorrēre*, which literally meant 'shrink back in terror' (from the prefix *ab-* 'away' and *horrēre* 'tremble' – which also gave English *horror* and *horrid*). The word used to have this intransitive meaning 'be repelled' in English too, but the transitive usage 'loathe' (which was probably introduced from Old French in the 15th century) has completely taken its place.

HORRID, HORROR

abide see BIDE

able [14] *Able* and *ability* both come ultimately from the Latin verb *habēre* 'have' or 'hold'. From this the Latin adjective *habilis* developed, meaning literally 'convenient or suitable for holding on to', and hence in more general terms 'suitable' or 'apt', and later, more positively, 'competent' or 'expert'. It came into English via Old French, bringing with it the noun *ablete* 'ability'. This was later reformed in English, on the model of its Latin source *habilitās*, to *ability*.

HABIT

ablution see LAVATORY

abode see BIDE

abominable [14] The Latin original of this word meant 'shun as an evil omen'. The prefix *ab-* 'away' was added to *ōmen* (source of English *omen*) to produce the verb *abōminārī*. From this was created the adjective *abōminābilis*, which reached English via Old French. From the 14th to the 17th century there was a general misapprehension that *abominable* was derived from Latin *ab hominem* 'away from man', hence 'beastly, unnatural'. This piece of fanciful folk etymology not only perpetuated the erroneous spelling *abhominable* throughout this period, but also seems to have contributed significantly to making the adjective much more strongly condemnatory.

OMEN

abort see ORIGIN

abound [14] *Abound* has no connection with *bind* or *bound*. Its Latin source means literally 'overflow',

and its nearest relative among English words is *water*. Latin *undāre* 'flow' derived from *unda* 'wave' (as in *undulate*), which has the same ultimate root as *water*. The addition of the prefix *ab-* 'away' created *abundāre* , literally 'flow away', hence 'overflow', and eventually 'be plentiful'. The present participial stem of the Latin verb gave English *abundant* and *abundance*. In the 14th and 15th centuries it was erroneously thought that *abound* had some connection with *have*, and the spelling *habound* was consequently common.

INUNDATE, SURROUND, UNDULATE, WATER

about [OE] *About* in Old English times meant 'around the outside of'; it did not develop its commonest present-day meaning, 'concerning', until the 13th century. In its earliest incarnation it was *onbūtan*, a compound made up of *on* and *būtan* 'outside' (this is the same word as modern English *but*, which was itself originally a compound, formed from the ancestors of *by* and *out* – so broken down into its ultimate constituents, *about* is *on by out*).

BUT, BY, OUT

above [OE] As in the case of *about*, the *a-* in *above* represents *on* and the *-b-* element represents *by*; *above* (Old English *abufan*) is a compound based on Old English *ufan*. This meant both 'on top' and 'down from above'; it is related to *over*, and is probably descended from a hypothetical West Germanic ancestor **ufana*, whose *uf-* element eventually became modern English *up*. So in a sense, *above* means 'on by up' or 'on by over'.

BY, ON, UP

abracadabra [16] This magical charm reached English, probably via French, from Greek *abrasadabra* (the *c* in the English word arose from a misinterpretation of the *c* in the original Greek word, which in the Greek alphabet stands for *s*). It seems to have originated (perhaps in the 3rd century AD) as a cabalistic word of the Basilidians, a Gnostic sect of Alexandria, and was probably based on *Abraxas*, the name of their supreme deity.

abridge see BRIEF

abroad [13] It was only in the 15th century that *abroad* came to mean 'in foreign parts'. Earlier, it had been used for 'out of doors', a sense still current today, if with a rather archaic air; but originally it meant 'widely' or 'about' (as in 'noise something abroad'). It was formed quite simply from *a* 'on' and the adjective *broad*, although it was probably modelled on the much earlier (Old English) phrase *on brede*, in which *brede* was a noun, meaning 'breadth'.

BROAD

abscess [16] *Abscess* comes, via French *abcès*, from Latin *abscessus*, a noun derived from *abscēdere* 'go away'. The constituent parts of this compound verb are *abs* 'away' and *cēdere* 'go', which has given English *cede* and a whole range of other words, such as *accede* and *recede*.

The notion linking 'abscesses' and 'going away' was that impure or harmful bodily humours were eliminated, or 'went away', via the pus that gathered in abscesses. It originated amongst the Greeks, who indeed had a word for it: *apostema*. This meant literally 'separation' (*apo* 'away' and *histánai* 'stand'), and Latin *abscessus* was an approximate translation of it, possibly by Aulus Cornelius Celsus, the Roman writer on medical and other matters.

ACCEDE, CEDE, RECEDE

absent [14] *Absent* is based ultimately on the Latin verb 'to be', *esse*. To this was added the prefix *ab-*

'away', giving Latin *abesse* 'be away'; and the present participial stem of *abesse* was *absent-*. Hence, via Old French, the adjective *absent* and the noun *absence*. It has been conjectured, incidentally, that the present stem used for Latin *esse* was a descendant of Indo-European **sontos* 'truth', from which English *sooth* comes.

absolute [14] *Absolute*, *absolution*, and *absolve* all come ultimately from the same source: Latin *absolvere* 'set free', a compound verb made up from the prefix *ab-* 'away' and the verb *solvere* 'loose' (from which English gets *solve* and several other derivatives, including *dissolve* and *resolve*). From the 13th to the 16th century an alternative version of the verb, *assoil*, was in more common use than *absolve*; this came from the same Latin original, but via Old French rather than by a direct route. The *t* of *absolute* and *absolution* comes from the past participial stem of the Latin verb – *absolūt-*. The noun, the adjective, and the verb have taken very different routes from their common semantic starting point, the notion of 'setting free': *absolve* now usually refers to freeing from responsibility and *absolution* to the remitting of sins, while *absolute* now means 'free from any qualification or restriction'.

➧ DISSOLVE, RESOLVE, SOLVE

absorb [15] *Absorb* comes, via French *absorber*, from Latin *absorbēre*, a compound verb formed from the prefix *ab-* 'away' and *sorbēre* 'suck up, swallow'. Words connected with drinking and swallowing quite often contain the sounds *s* or *sh*, *r*, and *b* or *p* – Arabic, for instance, has *surāb*, which gave us *syrup* – and this noisy gulping seems to have been reflected in an Indo-European base, **srobh-*, which lies behind both Latin *sorbēre* and Greek *rophéin* 'suck up'.

abstain [14] The literal meaning of this word's ultimate source, Latin *abstinēre*, was 'hold or keep away', and hence 'withhold' (the root verb, *tenēre*, produced many other derivatives in English, such as *contain*, *maintain*, *obtain*, and *retain*, as well as *tenacious*, *tenant*, *tenement*, *tenet*, *tenor*, and *tenure*). That is how it was used when it was first introduced into English (via Old French *abstenir*), and it was not until the 16th century that it began to be used more specifically for refraining from pleasurable activities, particularly the drinking of alcohol. The past participial stem of the Latin verb, *abstent-*, gave us *abstention*, while the present participial stem, *abstinent-*, produced *abstinent* and *abstinence*. There is no connection, incidentally, with the semantically similar *abstemious*, which comes from a Latin word for alcoholic drink, *tēmōtum*.

abstruse [16] It is not clear whether English borrowed *abstruse* from French *abstrus(e)* or directly from Latin *abstrūsus*, but the ultimate source is the Latin form. It is the past participle of the verb *abstrūdere*, literally 'thrust' (*trūdere*) 'away' (*ab*). (*Trūdere* contributed other derivatives to English, including *extrude* and *intrude*, and it is related to *threat*.) The original, literal meaning of *abstruse* was 'concealed', but the metaphorical 'obscure' is just as old in English.

abuse see USE

abut see BUTT

abyss [16] English borrowed *abyss* from late Latin *abyssus*, which in turn derived from Greek *ábussos*. This was an adjective meaning 'bottomless', from *a-* 'not' and *bussós* 'bottom', a dialectal variant of *buthós* (which is related to *bathys* 'deep', the source of English *bathyscape*). In Greek the adjective was used in the phrase *ábussos límnē* 'bottomless lake', but only the adjective was borrowed into Latin, bringing with it the meaning of the noun as well. In medieval times, a variant form arose in Latin – *abysmus*. It incorporated the Greek suffix *-ismós* (English *-ism*). It is

the source of French *abîme*, and was borrowed into English in the 13th century as *abysm* (whence the 19th-century derivative *abysmal*). It began to be ousted by *abyss* in the 16th century, however, and now has a distinctly archaic air.

acacia [16] *Acacia* comes via Latin from Greek *akakía*, a word for the shittah. This is a tree mentioned several times in the Bible (the Ark of the Covenant was made from its wood). It is not clear precisely what it was, but it was probably a species of what we now know as the acacia. The ultimate derivation of Greek *akakía* is obscure too; some hold that it is based on Greek *akḗ* 'point' (a distant relation of English *acid*), from the thorniness of the tree, but others suggest that it may be a loanword from Egyptian.

academy [16] Borrowed either from French *académie* or from Latin *acadēmia*, *academy* goes back ultimately to Greek *Akadēmíā*, the name of the place in Athens where the philosopher Plato (c. 428–347 BC) taught. Traditionally thought of as a grove ('the groves of Academe'), this was in fact more of an enclosed piece of ground, a garden or park; it was named after the Attic mythological hero Akadēmos or Hekadēmus. In its application to the philosophical doctrines of Plato, English *academy* goes back directly to its Latin source, but the more general meanings 'college, place of training' derive from French.

accelerate [16] *Accelerate* comes from Latin *accelerāre*, a compound verb formed from the intensive prefix *ad-* (*ac-* before /k/ sounds) and *celerāre* 'hurry'. *Celerāre*, in turn, derived from the adjective *celer* 'fast' (which gave English *celerity* [15] and is ultimately related to *hold*).

accent [14] *Accent* was originally a loan-translation from Greek into Latin (a loan-translation is when each constituent of a compound in one language is translated into its equivalent in another, and then reassembled into a new compound). Greek *prosōidíā* (whence English *prosody*) was formed from *pros* 'to' and *ōidḗ* 'song' (whence English *ode*); these elements were translated into Latin *ad* 'to' and *cantus* 'song' (whence English *chant*, *cant*, *cantata*, *canticle*), giving *accentus*. The notion underlying this combination of 'to' and 'song' was of a song added to speech – that is, the intonation of spoken language. The sense of a particular mode of pronunciation did not arise in English until the 16th century.

➧ CANT, CANTATA, CANTICLE, CHANT

accept [14] *Accept* comes ultimately from Latin *capere*, which meant 'take' (and was derived from the same root as English *heave*). The addition of the prefix *ad-* 'to' produced *accipere*, literally 'take to oneself', hence 'receive'. The past participle of this, *acceptus*, formed the basis of a new verb, *acceptāre*, denoting repeated action, which made its way via Old French into English.

➧ HEAVE

accident [14] Etymologically, an accident is simply 'something which happens' – 'an event'. That was what the word originally meant in English, and it was only subsequently that the senses 'something which happens by chance' and 'mishap' developed. It comes from the Latin verb *cadere* 'fall' (also the source of such diverse English words as *case*, *decadent*, and *deciduous*). The addition of the prefix *ad-* 'to' produced *accidere*, literally 'fall to', hence 'happen to'. Its present participle was used as an adjective in the Latin phrase *rēs accidēns* 'thing happening', and *accidēns* soon took on the role of a noun on its own, passing (in its stem form *accident-*) into Old French and thence into English.

CASE, DECADENT, DECIDUOUS

accolade [17] *Accolade* goes back to an assumed Vulgar Latin verb **accollāre*, meaning 'put one's arms round someone's neck' (*collum* is Latin for 'neck', and is the source of English *collar*). It put in its first recorded appearance in the Provençal noun *acolada*, which was borrowed into French as *accolade* and thence made its way into English. A memory of the original literal meaning is preserved in the use of *accolade* to refer to the ceremonial striking of a sword on a new knight's shoulders; the main current sense 'congratulatory expression of approval' is a later development.

COLLAR

accomplice [15] This word was borrowed into English (from French) as *complice* (and *complice* stayed in common usage until late in the 19th century). It comes from Latin *complex*, which is related to English *complicated*, and originally meant simply 'an associate', without any pejorative associations. The form *accomplice* first appears on the scene in the late 15th century (the first record of it is in William Caxton's *Charles the Great*), and it probably arose through a misanalysis of *complice* preceded by the indefinite article (*a complice*) as *acomplice*. It may also have been influenced by *accomplish* or *accompany*.

COMPLICATED

accomplish see COMPLETE

accord [12] In its original source, Vulgar Latin **accordāre*, *accord* meant literally 'heart-to-heart' (from Latin *ad* 'to' and *cord-*, the stem of *cor* 'heart'). It passed into Old French as *acorder*, and was borrowed comparatively early into English, turning up in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 1123.

Its general sense of 'being in agreement' has been narrowed down in English and other languages to the notion of 'being in harmony musically', and either Italian *accordare* or French *accorder* provided the basis for German *akkordion* (from which English got *accordion*), the musical instrument invented by Buschmann in Berlin in 1822.

CORDIAL

account [14] *Account* is of Old French origin. It was formed from *compter*, *conter* 'count' (which derived from Latin *computāre*) and the prefix *a-*. Its original meaning in English, too, was 'count' or 'count up'; this had disappeared by the end of the 18th century, but its specialized reference to the keeping of financial records is of equal antiquity. *Account for*, meaning 'explain', arose in the mid 18th century.

COUNT

accoutre [16] *Accoutre* is related to both *couture* and *sew*. English borrowed it from French *accoutrer*, which meant 'equip with something, especially clothes'. A stage earlier, Old French had *acoustrer*, formed from *cousture* (whence *couture*) and the prefix *a-*. This came from Vulgar Latin **consūtūra*, literally 'sewn together', from *con-* 'together' and *sūtūra* 'sewn' (whence English *suture*); *sūtūra* in turn came from the past participial stem of Latin *suere*, which derived from the same Indo-European root as English *sew*.

COUTURE, SEW, SUTURE

accretion see CRESCENT

accumulate [16] *Accumulate* was borrowed from Latin *accumulāre*, a compound verb formed from

the prefix *ad-*, here meaning 'in addition', and *cumulāre* 'heap up' (the source of English *cumulative*). *Cumulāre* itself derived from *cumulus* 'heap'; English adopted this with its original Latin meaning in the 17th century, but it was not until the early 19th century that it was applied (by the meteorologist Luke Howard) to mountainous billowing cloud formations.

CUMULATIVE, CUMULUS

accurate [16] 'Accuracy' is connected with 'curing', in the sense not of 'making better' but of 'looking after' – as in 'the cure of souls'. The adjective comes from Latin *accūrātus* 'done carefully', which in turn derived from a verb (*cūrāre* 'care for') formed from the noun *cūra* 'care' (other English words from this source are *curate*, *curious*, *procure*, and *secure*). The notion of doing something carefully led on naturally to the notion of exactness.

CURATE, CURIOUS, PROCURE, SECURE

accuse [13] *Accuse* comes via Old French *acuser* from the Latin verb *accūsāre*, which was based on the noun *causa* 'cause' – but cause in the sense not of 'something that produces a result', but of 'legal action' (a meaning preserved in English *cause list*, for instance). Hence *accūsāre* was to 'call someone to account for their actions'.

The grammatical term *accusative* [15] (denoting the case of the object of a verb in Latin and other languages) is derived ultimately from *accūsāre*, but it arose originally owing to a mistranslation. The Greek term for this case was *ptôsis aitiātikḗ* 'case denoting causation' – a reasonable description of the function of the accusative. Unfortunately the Greek verb *aitiâsthai* also meant 'accuse', and it was this sense that Latin grammarians chose to render when adopting the term.

CAUSE, EXCUSE

accustom see CUSTOM

ace [13] *Ace* comes from the name of a small ancient Roman coin, the *as* (which may have been of Etruscan origin). As well as denoting the coin, Latin *as* stood for 'one' or 'unity', and it was as the 'score of one at dice' that it first entered English.

ache [OE] Of the noun *ache* and the verb *ache*, the verb came first. In Old English it was *acan*. From it was formed the noun, *æce* or *ece*. For many centuries, the distinction between the two was preserved in their pronunciation: in the verb, the *ch* was pronounced as it is now, with a /k/ sound, but the noun was pronounced similarly to the letter *H*, with a /ch/ sound. It was not until the early 19th century that the noun came regularly to be pronounced the same way as the verb. It is not clear what the ultimate origins of *ache* are, but related forms do exist in other Germanic languages (Low German *āken*, for instance, and Middle Dutch *akel*), and it has been conjectured that there may be some connection with the Old High German exclamation (of pain) *ah*.

achieve [14] *Achieve* is related to *chief*. It comes from Old French *achever* 'bring to an end', or literally 'bring to a head', which was based on the phrase *a chief* 'to a head' (*chief* derives ultimately from Latin *caput* 'head').

The heraldic meaning of *achievement*, 'coat of arms', comes from the notion that the escutcheon was granted as a reward for a particular achievement. Over the centuries it has evolved an alternative form, *hatchment* [16].

CHIEF, HATCHMENT

acid [17] The original notion contained in the word *acid* is 'pointedness'. In common with a wide range of other English words (for example *acute*, *acne*, *edge*, *oxygen*) it can be traced back ultimately to the Indo-European base ***ak***, which meant 'be pointed or sharp'. Among the Latin derivatives of this base was the adjective *ācer* 'sharp'. From this was formed the verb *acere* 'be sharp or sour', and from this verb in turn the adjective *acidus* 'sour'. The scientist Francis Bacon seems to have been the first to introduce it into English, in the early 17th century (though whether directly from Latin or from French *acide* is not clear). Its use as a noun, in the strict technical sense of a class of substances that react with alkalis or bases, developed during the 18th century.

▶ ACACIA, ACNE, ACRID, ACUTE, ALACRITY, EAR, EDGE, OXYGEN

acknowledge see KNOW

acne [19] It is ironic that *acne*, that represents a low point in many teenagers' lives, comes from *acme*, 'the highest point'. The Greeks used *akme*, which literally meant 'point', for referring to spots on the face, but when it came to be rendered into Latin it was mistransliterated as *acnē*, and the error has stuck. (*Acme* comes, incidentally, from an Indo-European base ***ak***-'be pointed', and thus is related to *acid*, *edge*, and *oxygen*.)

▶ ACID, ACME, EDGE, OXYGEN

acolyte [14] *Acolyte* comes, via Old French and/or medieval Latin, from Greek *akólouthos* 'following'. This was formed from the prefix *a-*(which is related to *homos* 'same') and the noun *keleuthos* 'path', and it appears again in English in *anacolouthon* [18] (literally 'not following'), a technical term for lack of grammatical sequence. The original use of *acolyte* in English was as a minor church functionary, and it did not acquire its more general meaning of 'follower' until the 19th century.

▶ ANACOLOUTHON

acorn [OE] *Acorn* has no etymological connection with *oak*; its nearest linguistic relative in English is probably *acre*. The Old English word was *æcern*, which may well have derived from *æcer* 'open land' (the related Middle High German *ackeran* referred to beech mast as well as acorns, and Gothic *akran* developed more widely still, to mean simply 'fruit'). There are cognate words in other, non-Germanic, Indo-European languages, such as Russian *yagoda* 'berry' and Welsh *aeron* 'fruits'. Left to develop on its own, *æcern* would have become modern English *achern*, but the accidental similarity of *oak* and *corn* have combined to reroute its pronunciation.

▶ ACRE

acoustic [17] Appropriately enough, *acoustic* may be distantly related to *hear*. It first appeared in English in Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* 1605, borrowed from Greek *akoustikós*. This in turn was derived from the Greek verb for 'hear', *akoúein*, which, it has been speculated, may have some connection with ***khauzjan***, the original Germanic source of English *hear*, not to mention German *hören* and Dutch *horen* (as well as with Latin *cavēre* 'be on one's guard', and hence with English *caution* and *caveat*).

▶ CAUTION, CAVEAT, HEAR

acquaint [13] *Acquaint* is connected with *quaint*, distant though they may seem in meaning. It comes via Old French *acointer* from medieval Latin *accognitāre*, which was based ultimately on *cognitus*, the past participle of *cognoscere* 'know'. *Cognitus* gave English *cognition*, of course, but also *quaint*

(*cognitus* developed into *cointe*, *queinte* in Old French, and came to mean 'skilled, expert'; this led later to the notion of being skilfully made or elegant, which eventually degenerated into 'agreeably curious').

COGNITION, QUAINT

acquire [15] The original source of *acquire*, Latin *acquīrere*, meant literally 'get something extra'. It was formed from the verb *quaerere* 'try to get or obtain' (from which English gets *query*, the derivatives *enquire* and *require*, and, via the past participial stem, *quest* and *question*) plus the prefix *ad-*, conveying the idea of being additional. English borrowed the word via Old French *acquerre*, and it was originally spelled *acquere*, but around 1600 the spelling was changed to *acquire*, supposedly to bring it more into conformity with its Latin source.

QUERY, QUEST, QUESTION

acquit [13] *Acquit* is ultimately related to *quiet*. The Latin noun *quies*, from which we get *quiet*, was the basis of a probable verb **quietare*, later **quitare*, whose original meaning, 'put to rest', developed to 'settle', as in 'settle a debt'. With the addition of the prefix *ad-* this passed into Old French as *a(c)quiter*, and thence into English (still with the 'settling or discharging debts' meaning). The currently most common sense, 'declare not guilty', did not appear until the 14th century, and the most recent meaning, 'conduct oneself in a particular way', developed from the notion of discharging one's duties.

QUIET

acre [OE] *Acre* is a word of ancient ancestry, going back probably to the Indo-European base **ag-*, source of words such as *agent* and *act*. This base had a range of meanings covering 'do' and 'drive', and it is possible that the notion of driving contributed to the concept of driving animals on to land for pasture. However that may be, it gave rise to a group of words in Indo-European languages, including Latin *ager* (whence English *agriculture*), Greek *agros*, Sanskrit *ájras*, and a hypothetical Germanic **akraz*. By this time, people's agricultural activities had moved on from herding animals in open country to tilling the soil in enclosed areas, and all of this group of words meant specifically 'field'. From the Germanic form developed Old English *æcer*, which as early as 1000 AD had come to be used for referring to a particular measured area of agricultural land (as much as a pair of oxen could plough in one day).

ACT, AGENT, AGRICULTURE, EYRIE, ONAGER, PEREGRINE, PILGRIM

acrid [18] *Acrid* is related to *acid*, and probably owes its second syllable entirely to that word. It is based essentially on Latin *acer* 'sharp, pungent', which, like *acid*, *acute*, *oxygen*, and *edge*, derives ultimately from an Indo-European base **ak-* meaning 'be pointed or sharp'. When this was imported into English in the 18th century, the ending *-id* was artificially grafted on to it, most likely from the semantically similar *acid*.

ACID, ACRYLIC, ACUTE, EDGE, EGLANTINE, OXYGEN, PARAGON

acrobat [19] The Greek adjective *ákros* meant 'topmost, at the tip or extremity' (it derives ultimately from the Indo-European base **ak*meaning 'be pointed or sharp', which also gave rise to *acid*, *acute*, *oxygen*, and *edge*). It crops up in *acrophobia* 'fear of heights'; in *acropolis* 'citadel', literally 'upper city'; in *acromegaly* 'unnaturally enlarged condition of the hands, feet, and face', literally 'large extremities'; and in *acronym*, literally 'word formed from the tips of words'. *Acrobat* itself means literally 'walking on tiptoe'. The *-bat* morpheme comes from Greek *baínein* 'walk', which is closely

related to *basis* and *base*, and is also connected with *come*. *Akrobátēs* existed as a term in Greek, and reached English via French *acrobate*.

➧ ACID, ACUTE, EDGE, OXYGEN

across [13] English originally borrowed *across*, or the idea for it, from Old French. French had the phrase *à croix* or *en croix*, literally 'at *or* in cross', that is, 'in the form of a cross' or 'transversely'. This was borrowed into Middle English as *a creoix* or *o(n) croice*, and it was not until the 15th century that versions based on the native English form of the word *cross* began to appear: *in cross*, *on cross*, and the eventual winner, *across*.

➧ CROSS

acrostic [16] An acrostic is a piece of verse in which the first letters of each line when put together spell out a word. The term is of Greek origin (*akrostikhis*), and was formed from *ákros* 'at the extremity' (see ACROBAT) and *stíkhos* 'line of verse'. The second element crops up in several other prosodic terms, such as *distich* and *hemistich*, and comes from the Greek verb *steíkhein* 'go', which is related ultimately to English *stair*, *stile*, and *stirrup*.

➧ ACROBAT, DISTICH, HEMISTICH, STAIR, STILE, STIRRUP

acrylic [19] *Acrylic* was based ultimately on *acrolein* [19], the name of a very pungent poisonous organic compound. This in turn was formed from Latin *acer* 'sharp, pungent' (source of English *acrid*) and *olere* 'smell'.

act [14] *Act*, *action*, *active*, *actor* all go back to Latin *agere* 'do, perform' (which is the source of a host of other English derivatives, from *agent* to *prodigal*). The past participle of this verb was *āctus*, from which we get *act*, partly through French *acte*, but in the main directly from Latin. The Latin agent noun, *āctor*, came into the language at about the same time, although at first it remained a rather uncommon word in English, with technical legal uses; it was not until the end of the 16th century that it came into its own in the theatre (*player* had hitherto been the usual term).

Other Latin derivatives of the past participial stem *āct-* were the noun *āctiō*, which entered English via Old French *action*, and the adjective *āctīvus*, which gave English *active*. See also ACTUAL.

➧ ACTION, ACTIVE, AGENT, COGENT, EXAMINE, PRODIGAL

actual [14] In common with *act*, *action*, etc, *actual* comes ultimately from Latin *āctus*, the past participle of the verb *agere* 'do, perform'. In late Latin an adjective *āctuālis* was formed from the noun *āctus*, and this passed into Old French as *actuel*. English borrowed it in this form, and it was not until the 15th century that the spelling *actual*, based on the original Latin model, became general. At first its meaning was simply, and literally, 'relating to acts, active'; the current sense, 'genuine', developed in the mid 16th century.

➧ ACT, ACTION

acumen [16] *Acumen* is a direct borrowing from Latin *acūmen*, which meant both literally 'point' and figuratively 'sharpness'. It derived from the verb *acuere* 'sharpen', which was also the source of English *acute*. The original pronunciation of *acumen* in English /əˈkjūmen/, with the stress on the second syllable, very much on the pattern of the Latin original; it is only relatively recently that a pronunciation with the stress on the first syllable has become general.

➧ ACUTE

acute [14] *Acute* derives from Latin *acūtus* 'sharp' (which was also the source of English *ague*). This was the past participle of the verb *acuere* 'sharpen', which in turn was probably formed from the noun *acus* 'needle'. Like the related *acid*, *acetic*, and *acrid*, it can be traced back to an Indo-European base **ak-* 'be pointed', which was also the ultimate source of *oxygen* and *edge*.

➧ ACETIC, ACID, ACRID, AGUE, CUTE, EDGE, OXYGEN

adage [16] *Adage* was borrowed, via French, from Latin *adagium* 'maxim, proverb'. This seems to have been formed from a variant of *aio* 'I say' plus the prefix *ad-* 'to'. In the 16th and 17th centuries an alternative version, *adagy*, existed.

adamant [14] In Greek, *adamas* meant 'unbreakable, invincible'. It was formed from the verb *daman* 'subdue, break down' (which came from the same source as English *tame*) plus the negative prefix *a-*. It developed a noun usage as a 'hard substance', specifically 'diamond' or 'very hard metal', and this passed into Latin as *adamās*, or, in its stem form, *adamant-*. Hence Old French *adamaunt*, and eventually English *adamant*.

➧ DIAMOND, TAME

Adam's apple [18] The original apple in question was the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which the serpent in the Garden of Eden tricked Eve into eating, and which she in turn persuaded Adam to eat. It was traditionally believed that a piece of it stuck in Adam's throat, and so it became an appropriate and convenient metaphor for the thyroid cartilage of the larynx, which protrudes noticeably in men.

add [14] Etymologically, *add* means simply 'put to'. Its source is Latin *addere*, a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and the stem *-dere* 'put' (which is related to English *do*). Its original meaning in English was simply 'join one thing to another'; its specific mathematical use did not develop until the early 16th century.

➧ DO

adder [OE] In Old English, the term for a snake (any snake, not just an adder) was *nǣddre*; there are or were related forms in many other European languages, such as Latin *natrix*, Welsh *neidr*, and German *natter* (but there does not seem to be any connection with the *natterjack* toad). Around the 14th century, however, the word began to lose its initial consonant. The noun phrase including the indefinite article, *a nadder*, became misanalysed as *an adder*, and by the 17th century *nadder* had disappeared from the mainstream language (though it survived much longer in northern dialects).

addict [16] Originally, *addict* was an adjective in English, meaning 'addicted'. It was borrowed from Latin *addictus*, the past participle of *addicere*, which meant 'give over or award to someone'. This in turn was formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and the verb *dicere*. The standard meaning of *dicere* was 'say' (as in English *diction*, *dictionary*, and *dictate*), but it also had the sense 'adjudge' or 'allot', and that was its force in *addicere*.

➧ DICTATE, DICTION, DICTIONARY

addled [13] *Addled* may be traceable back ultimately to a confusion between 'wind' and 'urine' in Latin. In Middle English the term was *adel eye* 'addled egg'. of which the first part derived from Old English *adela* 'foul-smelling urine or liquid manure'. It seems possible that this may be a loan-translation of the Latin term for 'addled egg', *ōvum ūrīnae*, literally 'urine egg'. This in turn was an alteration, by folk etymology, of *ōvum ūrīnum*, a partial loan-translation of Greek *oúrion ōón*,

literally 'wind egg' (a *wind egg* is an imperfect or addled egg).

address [14] *Address* originally meant 'straighten'. William Caxton, for example, here uses it for 'stand up straight': 'The first day that he was washed and bathed he addressed him[self] right up in the basin' *Golden Legend* 1483. This gives a clue to its ultimate source, Latin *dīrectum* 'straight, direct'. The first two syllables of this seem gradually to have merged together to produce **drictum*, which with the addition of the prefix *ad-* was used to produce the verb **addrictiāre*. Of its descendants in modern Romance languages, Italian *addirizzare* most clearly reveals its source. Old French changed it fairly radically, to *adresser*, and it was this form which English borrowed. The central current sense of 'where somebody lives' developed in the 17th and 18th centuries from the notion of directing something, such as a letter, to somebody.

➧ DIRECT

adequate see EQUAL

adhere [16] *Adhere* was borrowed, either directly or via French *adhérer*, from Latin *adhaerēre*. This in turn was formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and the verb *haerēre* 'stick'. The past participial stem of *haerēre* was *haes-* (the ultimate source of English *hesitate*), and from *adhaes-* were formed the Latin originals of *adhesion* and *adhesive*.

➧ HESITATE

adjacent [15] *Adjacent* and *adjective* come from the same source, the Latin verb *jacere* 'throw'. The intransitive form of this, *jacēre*, literally 'be thrown down', was used for 'lie'. With the addition of the prefix *ad-*, here in the sense 'near to', was created *adjacēre*, 'lie near'. Its present participial stem, *adjacent-*, passed, perhaps via French, into English.

The ordinary Latin transitive verb *jacere*, meanwhile, was transformed into *adjicere* by the addition of the prefix *ad-*; it meant literally 'throw to', and hence 'add' or 'attribute', and from its past participial stem, *adject-*, was formed the adjective *adjectīvus*. This was used in the phrase *nomen adjectīvus* 'attributive noun', which was a direct translation of Greek *ónoma épithetos*. And when it first appeared in English (in the 14th century, via Old French *adjectif*) it was in *noun adjective*, which remained the technical term for 'adjective' into the 19th century. *Adjective* was not used as a noun in its own right until the early 16th century.

➧ ADJECTIVE, EASY, REJECT

adjourn [14] *Adjourn* originally meant 'appoint a day for', but over the centuries, such is human nature, it has come to be used for postponing, deferring, or suspending. It originated in the Old French phrase *à jour nomé* 'to an appointed day', from which the Old French verb *ajourner* derived. *Jour* 'day' came from late Latin *diurnum*, a noun formed from the adjective *diurnus* 'daily', which in turn was based on the noun *diēs* 'day'.

➧ DIARY, JOURNAL

adjust see JUST

adjutant [17] An adjutant was formerly simply an 'assistant', but the more specific military sense of an officer who acts as an aide to a more senior officer has now virtually ousted this original meaning. The word comes from a Latin verb for 'help', and is in fact related to English *aid*. Latin *adjuvāre* 'help' developed a new form, *adjūtāre*, denoting repeated action, and the present participial stem of this, *adjutant-*'helping', was borrowed into English.

AID, COADJUTOR

admiral [13] Admirals originally had nothing specifically to do with the sea. The word comes ultimately from Arabic *'amīr* 'commander' (from which English later also acquired *emir* [17]). This entered into various titles followed by the particle *-al-* 'of' (*'amīr-al-bahr* 'commander of the sea', *'amīr-al-mūminīn* 'commander of the faithful'), and when it was borrowed into European languages, *'amīr-al-* became misconstrued as an independent, free-standing word. Moreover, the Romans, when they adopted it, smuggled in their own Latin prefix *ad-*, producing *admiral*. When this reached English (via Old French) it still meant simply 'commander', and it was not until the time of Edward III that a strong naval link began to emerge. The Arabic title *'amīr-al-bahr* had had considerable linguistic influence in the wake of Arabic conquests around the Mediterranean seaboard (Spanish *almirante de la mar*, for instance), and specific application of the term to a naval commander spread via Spain, Italy, and France to England. Thus in the 15th century England had its *Admiral of the Sea* or *Admiral of the Navy*, who was in charge of the national fleet. By 1500 the maritime connection was firmly established, and *admiral* came to be used on its own for 'supreme naval commander'.

EMIR

admire [16] *Admire* has rather run out of steam since it first entered the language. It comes originally from the same Latin source as *marvel* and *miracle*, and from the 16th to the 18th centuries it meant 'marvel at' or 'be astonished'. Its weaker modern connotations of 'esteem' or 'approval', however, have been present since the beginning, and have gradually ousted the more exuberant expressions of wonderment. It is not clear whether English borrowed the word from French *admirer* or directly from its source, Latin *admīrārī*, literally 'wonder at', a compound verb formed from *ad-* and *mīrārī* 'wonder'.

MARVEL, MIRACLE

admit [15] This is one of a host of words, from *mission* to *transmit*, to come down to English from Latin *mittere* 'send'. Its source, *admittere*, meant literally 'send to', hence 'allow to enter'. In the 15th and 16th centuries the form *amit* was quite common, borrowed from French *amettre*, but learned influence saw to it that the more 'correct' Latin form prevailed.

COMMIT, MISSION, TRANSMIT

admonish [14] In Middle English times this verb was *amoneste*. It came, via Old French *amonester*, from an assumed Vulgar Latin verb **admonestārе*, an alteration of Latin *admonērе* (*monērе* meant 'warn', and came from the same source as English *mind*). The prefix *ad-* was reintroduced from Latin in the 15th century, while the *-ish* ending arose from a mistaken analysis of *-este* as some sort of past tense inflection; the *t* was removed when producing infinitive or present tense forms, giving spellings such as *amonace* and *admonyss*, and by the 16th century this final *-is* had become identified with and transformed into the more common *-ish* ending.

MIND

ado [14] In origin, *ado* (like *affair*) means literally 'to do'. This use of the preposition *at* (*ado* = *at do*) is a direct borrowing from Old Norse, where it was used before the infinitive of verbs, where English would use *to*. *Ado* persisted in this literal sense in northern English dialects, where Old Norse influence was strong, well into the 19th century, but by the late 16th century it was already a

noun with the connotations of 'activity' or 'fuss' which have preserved it (alongside the indigenous *to-do*) in modern English.

DO

adobe [18] *Adobe* is of Egyptian origin, from the time of the pharaohs. It comes from Coptic *tōbe* 'brick' (the form *t.b* appears in hieroglyphs). This was borrowed into Arabic, where the addition of the definite article *al* produced *attob* 'the brick'. From Arabic it passed into Spanish (the corridor through which so many Arabic words reached other European languages), and its use by the Spanish-speaking population of North America (for a sun-dried brick) led to its adoption into English in the mid 18th century.

adolescent [15] The original notion lying behind both *adolescent* and *adult* is of 'nourishment'. The Latin verb *alere* meant 'nourish' (*alimentary* and *alimony* come from it, and it is related to *old*). A derivative of this, denoting the beginning of an action, was *alēscere* 'be nourished', hence 'grow'. The addition of the prefix *ad-* produced *adolēscere*. Its present participial stem, *adolēscent-*'growing', passed into English as the noun *adolescent* 'a youth' (the adjective appears not to have occurred before the end of the 18th century). Its past participle, *adultus* 'grown', was adopted into English as *adult* in the 16th century.

ADULT, ALIMENTARY, ALIMONY, COALESCE, COALITION, PROLETARIAN, PROLIFIC

adopt see OPINION

adore see ORATOR

adorn see ORNAMENT

adrenaline [20] The hormone adrenaline is secreted by glands just above the kidneys. From their position these are called the '*adrenal* glands' [19], a term based on Latin *rēnes* 'kidney', which has also given English *renal* [17] and (via Old French) the now obsolete *reins* 'kidneys' [14]. The discovery of adrenaline and the coining of its name are both disputed: they may have been the work of Dr Jokichi Takamine or of Dr Norton L. Wilson.

adultery [14] Neither *adultery* nor the related *adulterate* have any connection with *adult*. Both come ultimately from the Latin verb *adulterāre* 'debauch, corrupt' (which may have been based on Latin *alter* 'other', with the notion of pollution from some extraneous source). By the regular processes of phonetic change, *adulterāre* passed into Old French as *avoutrer*, and this was the form which first reached English, as *avouter* (used both verbally, 'commit adultery', and nominally, 'adulterer') and as the nouns *avoutery* 'adultery' and *avouterer* 'adulterer'. Almost from the first they coexisted in English beside *adult-* forms, deriving either from Law French or directly from Latin, and during the 15th to 17th centuries these gradually ousted the *avout-* forms. *Adulter*, the equivalent of *avouter*, clung on until the end of the 18th century, but the noun was superseded in the end by *adulterer* and the verb by a new form, *adulterate*, directly based on the past participle of Latin *adulterāre*, which continued to mean 'commit adultery' until the mid 19th century.

ALTER

adumbrate see UMBRAGE

advance [13] *Advance* originated in the Latin adverb *abante* 'before' (source of, among others, French *avant* and Italian *avanti*), which in turn was based on *ab* 'from' and *ante* 'before'. In post-classical times a verb, **abantiāre*, seems to have been formed from the adverb. It developed into Old

French *avancer*, and passed into English as *avaunce*, initially with the meaning 'promote'. A new form, *advancer*, started life in Old French, on the mistaken association of *avancer* with other *av-* words, such as *aventure*, which really did derive from Latin words with the *ad-* prefix; over the 15th and 16th centuries this gradually established itself in English. The noun *advance* did not appear until the 17th century.

advantage [14] *Advantage* comes from Old French *avantage*, which was based on *avant* 'before'; the notion behind its formation was of being ahead of others, and hence in a superior position. As with *advance*, the intrusive *-d*became established in the 16th century, on the analogy of words genuinely containing the Latin prefix *ad-*. The reduced form *vantage* actually predates *advantage* in English, having entered the language via Anglo-Norman in the 13th century.

adventure [13] *Adventure* derives ultimately from a Latin verb meaning 'arrive'. It originally meant 'what comes or happens by chance', hence 'luck', but it took a rather pessimistic downturn via 'risk, danger' to (in the 14th century) 'hazardous undertaking'. Its Latin source was *advenīre*, formed from the prefix *ad*and *venīre* 'come'. Its past participle stem, *advent-*, produced English *advent* [12] and *adventitious* [17], but it was its future participle, *adventura* 'about to arrive', which produced *adventure*. In the Romance languages in which it subsequently developed (Italian *avventura*, Spanish *aventura*, and French *aventure*, the source of Middle English *aventure*) the *d* disappeared, but it was revived in 15th – 16th-century French in imitation of Latin. The reduced form *venture* first appears in the 15th century.

➧ ADVENTITIOUS, AVENT, VENTURE

adverb [15] *Adverb* comes ultimately from a Latin word modelled on Greek *epírrhēma*, literally 'added word'. The elements of this compound (the prefix *epi-* and *rhēma* 'word') were translated literally into Latin (*ad-* and *verbum*), giving *adverbum*. English took the word either directly from Latin, or via French *adverbe*.

➧ VERB

advertise [15] When it was originally borrowed into English, from French, *advertise* meant 'notice'. It comes ultimately from the Latin verb *advertere* 'turn towards' (whose past participle *adversus* 'hostile' is the source of English *adverse* [14] and *adversity* [13]). A later variant form, *advertire*, passed into Old French as *avertir* 'warn' (not to be confused with the *avertir* from which English gets *avert* [15] and *averse* [16], which came from Latin *abvertere* 'turn away'). This was later reformed into *advertir*, on the model of its Latin original, and its stem form *advertiss-* was taken into English, with its note of 'warning' already softening into 'giving notice of', or simply 'noticing'. The modern sense of 'describing publicly in order to increase sales' had its beginnings in the mid 18th century. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the verb was pronounced with the main stress on its second syllable, like the *advertise-* in *advertisement*.

➧ ADVERSE, ADVERSITY, VERSE

advice [13] Like modern French *avis*, *advice* originally meant 'opinion', literally 'what seems to one to be the case'. In Latin, 'seem' was usually expressed by the passive of the verb *vidēre* 'see'; thus, *vīsum est*, 'it seems' (literally 'it is seen'). With the addition of the dative first person pronoun, one could express the notion of opinion: *mihi vīsum est*, 'it seems to me'. It appears either that this was partially translated into Old French as *ce m'est a vis*, or that the past participle *vīsum* was nominalized in Latin, making possible such phrases as *ad* (*meum*) *vīsum* 'in (my) view'; but either

way it is certain that *a(d)-* became prefixed to *vīs(um)*, producing a new word, *a(d)vis*, for 'opinion'. It was originally borrowed into English without the *d*, but learned influence had restored the Latin spelling by the end of the 15th century. As to its meaning, 'opinion' was obsolete by the mid 17th century, but already by the late 14th century the present sense of 'counsel' was developing.

The verb *advise* [14] probably comes from Old French *aviser*, based on *avis*.

▶ VISION, VISIT

advocate [14] Etymologically, *advocate* contains the notion of 'calling', specifically of calling someone in for advice or as a witness. This was the meaning of the Latin verb *advocāre* (formed from *vocāre* 'call', from which English also gets *vocation*). Its past participle, *advocātus*, came to be used as a noun, originally meaning 'legal witness or adviser', and later 'attorney'. In Old French this became *avocat*, the form in which English borrowed it; it was later relatinized to *advocate*. The verb *advocate* does not appear until the 17th century.

The word was also borrowed into Dutch, as *advocaat*, and the compound *advocaatenborrel*, literally 'lawyer's drink', has, by shortening, given English the name for a sweetish yellow concoction of eggs and brandy.

▶ INVOKE, REVOKE, VOCATION

aegis [18] The notion of 'protection' contained in this word goes back to classical mythology, in which one of the functions or attributes of the Greek god Zeus (and later of Roman Jupiter or Minerva) was the giving of protection. This was usually represented visually as a shield, traditionally held to be made of goatskin – hence Greek *aigís*, the name of the shield, came to be associated in the popular imagination with *aix* (*aig-* in its stem form), the Greek word for 'goat'. English borrowed the word directly from Latin.

aeolian harp [18] Aeolus was the Greek god of the winds (the form of the name is Latin; the original Greek was *Aiolos*, deriving from the adjective *aiolos* 'quick-moving'). Hence the application of the epithet to a musical instrument whose strings are sounded by the breeze blowing over them. The term is first recorded in the writings of Erasmus Darwin, at the end of the 18th century.

aeon see AGE

aeroplane [19] The prefix *aero-* comes ultimately from Greek *āēr* 'air', but many of the terms containing it (such as *aeronaut* and *aerostat*) reached English via French. This was the case, too, with *aeroplane*, in the sense of 'heavier-than-air flying machine'. The word was first used in English in 1873 (30 years before the Wright brothers' first flight), by D S Brown in the Annual Report of the Aeronautical Society – he refers vaguely to an aeroplane invented by 'a Frenchman'. The abbreviated form *plane* followed around 1908. (An earlier, and exclusively English, use of the word *aeroplane* was in the sense 'aerofoil, wing'; this was coined in the 1860s, but did not long survive the introduction of the 'aircraft' sense.)

Aeroplane is restricted in use mainly to British English (and even there now has a distinctly old-fashioned air). The preferred term in American English is *airplane*, a refashioning of *aeroplane* along more 'English' lines which is first recorded from 1907.

▶ AIR

aesthetic [18] In strict etymological terms, *aesthetic* relates to perception via the senses. It comes

ultimately from the Greek verb *aísthesthai* 'perceive' (which is related to Latin *audīre* 'hear'), and this meaning is preserved in *anaesthetic*, literally 'without feeling'. The derived adjective *aisthētikós* reached Western Europe via modern Latin *aesthēticus*, and was first used (in its Germanized form *ästhetisch*) in the writings of the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Here, it retained its original sense, 'perceptual', but its use by A T Baumgarten as the title (*Æsthetica*) of a work on the theory of beauty in art (1750) soon led to its adoption in its now generally accepted meaning.

AUDIBLE, AUDITION

aestivate see ETHER

affable [16] The Latin original of *affable*, *affābilis*, meant 'easy to speak to'. It was formed from the verb *affārī* 'speak to', which in turn was derived from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *fārī* 'speak' (the source of *fable*, *fame*, and *fate*). It reached English via Old French *affable*.

FABLE, FAME, FATE

affair [13] Like *ado*, and of course *to-do*, *affair* originally meant literally 'to do'. It was coined in Old French from the phrase *à faire* 'to do', and entered English via Anglo-Norman *afere*. The spelling *affair* was established by Caxton, who based it on the French model. The specific sense of a 'love affair' dates from the early 18th century.

FACT

affect There are two distinct verbs *affect* in English: 'simulate insincerely' [15] and 'have an effect on' [17]; but both come ultimately from the same source, Latin *afficere*. Of compound origin, from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *facere* 'do', this had a wide range of meanings. One set, in reflexive use, was 'apply oneself to something', and a new verb, *affectāre*, was formed from its past participle *affectus*, meaning 'aspire or pretend to have'. Either directly or via French *affecter*, this was borrowed into English, and is now most commonly encountered in the past participle adjective *affected* and the derived noun *affectation*. Another meaning of *afficere* was 'influence', and this first entered English in the 13th century by way of its derived noun *affectiō*, meaning 'a particular, usually unfavourable disposition' – hence *affection*. The verb itself was a much later borrowing, again either through French or directly from the Latin past participle *affectus*.

FACT

affinity [14] The abstract notion of 'relationship' in *affinity* was originally a more concrete conception of a border. The word comes, via Old French *afinite*, from the Latin adjective *affinis*, which meant literally 'bordering on something'. It was formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and the noun *finis* 'border' (from which English also gets *finish*, *confine*, and *define*).

CONFINE, DEFINE, FINISH, PARAFFIN, REFINE

affix see FIX

afflict [14] When it originally entered English, *afflict* meant 'overthrow', reflecting its origins in Latin *afflīgere* 'throw down', a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *flīgere* 'strike'. English *afflict* comes either from the Latin past participle *afflictus*, from a new Latin verb formed from this, *afflictāre*, or perhaps from the now obsolete English adjective *afflict*, which was borrowed from Old French *aflit* and refashioned on the Latin model. The meaning 'torment, distress' developed in the early 16th century.

affluent [15] The meaning 'rich' is a fairly recent development for *affluent*; it is first recorded in the mid 18th century. Originally the adjective meant simply 'flowing'. It came, via Old French, from Latin *affluent-*, the present participle of *affluere*, a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'towards' and *fluere* 'flow' (the source of English *fluid*, *fluent*, *flux*, *fluctuate*, and many other derivatives).

➧ FLUCTUATE, FLUENT, FLUID, FLUX

afford [OE] This verb originally meant 'accomplish, fulfil'. In Old English times it was *geforthian*, formed from the prefix *ge-*, denoting completion of an action, and *forthian* 'advance towards completion' or literally 'further' (from the adverb *forth*). The notion of accomplishing something or managing something gradually led, by the 15th century, to the idea of being able to do something because one has enough money. Meanwhile, the original *ge-* prefix, which by Middle English times had become *i-* (*iforthien*), had been transformed into *af-* under the influence of the many Latin-based words beginning in *aff-*, and in the 16th century spellings with final *d* in place of *th* start to appear.

➧ FORTH

affray [14] *Affray* is a word of mixed Germanic and Romance origin. The noun comes from the verb, 'alarm' (now obsolete, but still very much with us in the form of its past participle, *afraid*), which was borrowed into English from Anglo-Norman *afrayer* and Old French *effreer* and *esfreer*. These go back to a hypothetical Vulgar Latin verb **exfridāre*, which was composed of the Latin prefix *ex-* 'out' and an assumed noun **fridus*, which Latin took from the Frankish **frithuz* 'peace' (cognate with German *friede* 'peace', and with the name *Frederick*). The underlying meaning of the word is thus 'take away someone's peace'.

➧ AFRAID, BELFRY

affront [14] The present-day notion of 'insulting someone' has replaced the more direct action of hitting them in the face. *Affront* comes, via Old French *afronter*, from Vulgar Latin **affrontāre* 'strike in the face', which was formed from the Latin phrase *ad frontem*, literally 'to the face'.

➧ FRONT

after [OE] In the first millennium AD many Germanic languages had forms cognate with Old English *æfter* (Gothic *aftra*, for example, and Old Norse *aptr*), but, with the exception of Dutch *achter*, none survive. It is not clear what their ultimate origin is, but the suffix they share may well be a comparative one, and it is possible that they derive from a Germanic base **af-*(represented in Old English *æftan* 'from behind'). It has been suggested that this goes back to Indo-European **ap-* (source of Latin *ab* 'away, from' and English *of(f)*), in which case *after* would mean literally 'more off' – that is, 'further away'.

Nautical *aft* is probably a shortening of *abaft*, formed, with the prefixes *a-* 'on' and *be-* 'by', from Old English *æftan*.

➧ OF, OFF

aftermath [16] Originally, and literally, an aftermath was a second crop of grass or similar grazing vegetation, grown after an earlier crop in the same season had been harvested. Already by the mid 17th century it had taken on the figurative connotations of 'resulting condition' which are today its only living sense. The *-math* element comes from Old English *mǣth* 'mowing', a noun

descended from the Germanic base *$m\bar{a}$, source of English *mow*.

➧ MOW

again [OE] The underlying etymological sense of *again* is 'in a direct line with, facing', hence 'opposite' and 'in the opposite direction, back' (its original meaning in Old English). It comes from a probable Germanic **gagin* 'straight', which was the source of many compounds formed with *on* or *in* in various Germanic languages, such as Old Saxon *angegin* and Old Norse *íg gegn*. The Old English form was *ongēan*, which would have produced *ayen* in modern English; however, Norse-influenced forms with a hard *g* had spread over the whole country from northern areas by the 16th century. The meaning 'once more, anew' did not develop until the late 14th century. From Old English times until the late 16th century a prefix-less form *gain* was used in forming compounds. It carried a range of meanings, from 'against' to 'in return', but today survives only in *gainsay*.

The notion of 'opposition' is carried through in *against*, which was formed in the 12th century from *again* and what was originally the genitive suffix *-es*, as in *always* and *nowadays*. The parasitic *-t* first appeared in the 14th century.

age [13] *Age* has undergone considerable transmutations and abbreviations since its beginnings in Latin. Its immediate source in English is Old French *aage*, which was the product of a hypothetical Vulgar Latin form **aetāticum* (the *t* is preserved in Provençal *atge*). This was based on Latin *aetāt-* (stem of *aetās*), which was a shortening of *aevitas*, which in turn came from *aevum* 'lifetime'. This entered English in more recognizable form in *medieval*, *primeval*, etc; it is related to Greek *aiōn* 'age', from which English gets *aeon* [17], and it can be traced back to the same root that produced (via Old Norse *ei*) the now archaic adverb *ay(e)* 'ever' (as in 'will aye endure').

➧ AEON, AYE

agenda [17] *Agenda* is the plural of Latin *agendum*, which is the gerundive form of the verb *agere* 'do' (see AGENT); it thus means literally 'things to be done'. When the word first entered the language it was given an anglicized singular form, *agend*, with the plural *agends*, but this seems to have disappeared by the 18th century. The formal plurality of *agenda* is still often insisted on by purists, but it has been used as a singular noun since the mid 18th century.

➧ ACT, AGENT

agent [15] Latin *agere*, a verb of great semantic breadth ('drive, lead, act, do'), has been a prolific source of English words. Its past participle, *āctus*, produced *act*, *action*, *active*, *actor*, *actual*, *cachet*, and *exact*, while other parts of its paradigm lie behind *agile*, *agitate*, *ambiguous*, *coagulate*, *cogent*, *cogitate*, *examine*, *exigent*, *exiguous*, and *prodigal*. Its most obvious offspring, however, are *agent* (literally '(person) doing something') and *agency*, formed from the Latin present participial stem *agent-*. *Agere* itself is of considerable antiquity, being related to other Indo-European verbs such as Greek *ágein* 'drive, lead', Old Norse *aka* 'travel in a vehicle', and Sanskrit *ájati* 'drives'.

➧ ACT, AGILE, AMBIGUOUS, CACHET, COGENT, DEMAGOGUE, EXACT, EXAMINE, PRODIGAL

agglutinate see GLUE

aggravate [16] *Aggravate* originally meant literally 'to weigh down' or 'to make heavier' (it was modelled on Latin *aggravare* 'to make heavier', which in turn was based on *gravis* 'heavy', source of English *gravity* and *grief*; its first cousin is *aggrieve* [13], which came via Old French *agrever*).

From the first it was generally used in a metaphorical sense, and by the end of the 16th century the meaning 'to make worse' was well established. The sense 'to annoy', which some purists still object to, dates from at least the early 17th century.

GRAVE, GRAVITY, GRIEF

aggregate [15] Etymologically, *aggregate* contains the notion of a collection of animals. It comes from *greg-*, the stem of the Latin noun *grex* 'flock, herd' (also the source of *gregarious*). This formed the basis of a verb *aggregāre* 'collect together', whose past participle *aggregātus* passed into English as *aggregate*. Latin *grex* is related to Greek *agorā* 'open space, market place', from which English gets *agoraphobia*.

AGORAPHOBIA, EGREGIOUS, GREGARIOUS, SEGREGATE

aggression [17] The violent associations of *aggression* have developed from the much milder notion of 'approaching' somebody. The Latin verb *aggredī* 'attack' was based on the prefix *ad-* 'towards' and *gradī* 'walk', a verb derived in its turn from the noun *gradus* 'step' (from which English gets, among many others, *grade*, *gradual*, and *degree*).

DEGREE, GRADE, GRADUAL

aggrieve see AGGRAVATE

aghast [13] *Aghast* was originally the past participle of a verb, *agasten* 'frighten', which in turn was based on the Old English verb *gāstan* 'torment'. The spelling with *gh* did not finally become established until the 18th century, and in fact *aghast* was the last in a series of etymologically related words in the general semantic area of 'fear' and 'horror' to undergo this transformation. It seems to have acquired its *gh* by association with *ghastly*, which in turn got it from *ghost* (probably under the ultimate influence of Flemish *gheest*).

agiotage [19] *Agiotage* is the speculative buying and selling of stocks and shares. The term was borrowed from French, where it was based on *agioter* 'speculate', a verb formed from the noun *agio* 'premium paid on currency exchanges'. English acquired *agio* in the 17th century (as with so many other banking and financial terms, directly from Italian – *aggio*). This Italian word is thought to be an alteration of a dialectal form *lajjē*, borrowed from medieval Greek *allagion* 'exchange'. This in turn was based on Greek *allagē* 'change', which derived ultimately from *állos* 'other' (a word distantly related to English *else*).

ELSE

agitate [16] *Agitate* is one of a host of English words descended ultimately from Latin *agere* (see AGENT). Among the many meanings of *agere* was 'drive, move', and a verb derived from it denoting repeated action, *agitāre*, hence meant 'move to and fro'. This physical sense of shaking was present from the start in English *agitate*, but so was the more metaphorical 'perturb'. The notion of political agitation does not emerge until the early 19th century, when the Marquis of Anglesey is quoted as saying to an Irish deputation: 'If you really expect success, agitate, agitate, agitate!' In this meaning, a derivative of Latin *agitāre* has entered English via Russian in *agitprop* 'political propaganda' [20], in which *agit* is short for *agitatsiya* 'agitation'.

ACT, AGENT

agnostic [19] *Agnostic* is an invented word. It was coined by the English biologist and religious sceptic T H Huxley (1825–95) to express his opposition to the views of religious gnostics of the

time, who claimed that the world of the spirit (and hence God) was knowable (*gnostic* comes ultimately from Greek *gnōsis* 'knowledge'). With the addition of the Greek-derived prefix *a-*'not' Huxley proclaimed the ultimate unknowability of God. The circumstances of the coinage, or at least of an early instance of the word's use by its coiner, were recorded by R H Hutton, who was present at a party held by the Metaphysical Society in a house on Clapham Common in 1869 when Huxley suggested *agnostic*, basing it apparently on St Paul's reference to the altar of 'the Unknown God'.

ago [14] Historically, *ago* is the past participle of a verb. Its earlier, Middle English, form – *agone* – reveals its origins more clearly. It comes from the Old English verb *āgān* 'pass away', which was formed from *gān* 'go' and the prefix *ā-*'away, out'. At first it was used *before* expressions of time ('For it was ago five year that he was last there', *Guy of Warwick* 1314), but this was soon superseded by the now current postnominal use.

➧ GO

agog [15] *Agog* probably comes from Old French *gogue* 'merriment'. It was used in the phrase *en gogue*, meaning 'enjoying oneself' (Randle Cotgrave, in his *Dictionarie of the French and English tongues* 1611, defines *estre en ses gogues* as 'to be frolicke, lustie, lively, wanton, gamesome, all-a-hoit, in a pleasant humour; in a veine of mirth, or in a merrie mood'), and this was rendered into English as *agog*, with the substitution of the prefix *a-* (as in *asleep*) for *en* and the meaning toned down a bit to 'eager'. It is not clear where *gogue* came from (it may perhaps be imitative of noisy merrymaking), but later in its career it seems to have metamorphosed into *go-go*, either through reduplication of its first syllable (*gogue* had two syllables) or through assimilation of the second syllable to the first: hence the French phrase *à go-go* 'joyfully', and hence too English *go-go* dancers.

agony [14] *Agony* is one of the more remote relatives of that prolific Latin verb *agere* (see AGENT). Its ultimate source is the Greek verb *ágein* 'lead', which comes from the same Indo-European root as *agere*. Related to *ágein* was the Greek noun *agón*, originally literally 'a bringing of people together to compete for a prize', hence 'contest, conflict' (which has been borrowed directly into English as *agon*, a technical term for the conflict between the main characters in a work of literature). Derived from *agón* was *agōnia* '(mental) struggle, anguish', which passed into English via either late Latin *agōnia* or French *agonie*. The sense of physical suffering did not develop until the 17th century; hitherto, *agony* had been reserved for mental stress. The first mention of an *agony column* comes in the magazine *Fun* in 1863.

➧ ANTAGONIST

agoraphobia [19] *Agoraphobia* – fear of open spaces or, more generally, of simply being out of doors – is first referred to in an 1873 issue of the *Journal of Mental Science*; this attributes the term to Dr C Westphal, and gives his definition of it as 'the fear of squares or open places'. This would be literally true, since the first element in the word represents Greek *agorá* 'open space, typically a market place, used for public assemblies' (the most celebrated in the ancient world was the Agora in Athens, rivalled only by the Forum in Rome). The word *agorá* came from *ageirein* 'assemble', which is related to Latin *grex* 'flock', the source of English *gregarious*.

Agoraphobia was not the first of the *-phobias*. That honour goes to *hydrophobia* in the mid 16th

century. But that was an isolated example, and the surge of compounds based on Greek *phóbos* 'fear' really starts in the 19th century. At first it was used for symptoms of physical illness (*photophobia* 'abnormal sensitivity to light' 1799), for aversions to other nationalities (*Gallophobia* 1803; the synonymous *Francophobia* does not appear until 1887), and for facetious formations (*dustophobia*, Robert Southey, 1824), and the range of specialized psychological terms familiar today does not begin to appear until the last quarter of the century (CLAUSTROPHOBIA 1879, *acrophobia* 'fear of heights' from Greek *akros* 'topmost' – see ACROBAT – 1892).

➧ AGGREGATE, ALLEGORY, GREGARIOUS, SEGREGATE

agree [14] Originally, if a thing 'agreed you', it was to your liking, it pleased you. This early meaning survives in the adjective *agreeable* [14], but the verb has meanwhile moved on via 'to reconcile (people who have quarrelled)' and 'to come into accord' to its commonest present-day sense, 'to concur'. It comes from Old French *agréer* 'to please', which was based on the phrase *a gré* 'to one's liking'. *Gré* was descended from Latin *grātum*, a noun based on *grātus* 'pleasing', from which English also gets *grace* and *grateful*.

➧ CONGRATULATE, GRACE, GRATEFUL, GRATITUDE

ague [14] In its origins, *ague* is the same word as *acute*. It comes from the Latin phrase *febris acuta* 'sharp fever' (which found its way into Middle English as *fever agu*). In the Middle Ages the Latin adjective *acuta* came to be used on its own as a noun meaning 'fever'; this became *aguë* in medieval French, from which it was borrowed into English. From the end of the 14th century *ague* was used for 'malaria' (the word *malaria* itself did not enter the language until the mid 18th century).

➧ ACUTE

aid [15] *Aid* comes ultimately from the same source as *adjutant* (which originally meant simply 'assistant'). Latin *juvāre* became, with the addition of the prefix *ad-* 'to', *adjuvāre* 'give help to'; from its past participle *adjutus* was formed a new verb, *adjūtāre*, denoting repeated action, and this passed into Old French as *aïdier*, the source of English *aid*.

➧ ADJUTANT, JOCUND

ail [OE] Now virtually obsolete except in the metaphorical use of its present participial adjective *ailing*, *ail* is of long but uncertain history. The Old English verb *egl(i)an* came from the adjective *egle* 'troublesome', which had related forms in other Germanic languages, such as Middle Low German *egelen* 'annoy' and Gothic *agls* 'disgraceful', *aglo* 'oppression'. The derivative *ailment* did not appear until as late as the 18th century.

aileron see AISLE

aim [14] Etymologically, *aim* is a contraction of *estimate* (see ESTEEM). The Latin verb *aestimāre* became considerably shortened as it developed in the various Romance languages (Italian has *stimare*, for instance, and Provençal *esmar*). In Old French its descendant was *esmer*, to which was added the prefix *a-* (from Latin *ad-* 'to'), producing *aesmer*; and from one or both of these English acquired *aim*. The notion of estimating or calculating was carried over into the English verb, but died out after about a hundred years. However, the derived sense of calculating, and hence directing, one's course is of equal antiquity in the language.

➧ ESTEEM, ESTIMATE

air [13] Modern English *air* is a blend of three strands of meaning from, ultimately, two completely separate sources. In the sense of the gas we breathe it goes back via Old French *air* and Latin *āēr* to Greek *āēr* 'air' (whence the *aero*-compounds of English; see AEROPLANE). Related words in Greek were *āērni* 'I blow' and *aúrā* 'breeze' (from which English acquired *aura* in the 18th century), and cognates in other Indo-European languages include Latin *ventus* 'wind', English *wind*, and *nirvana* 'extinction of existence', which in Sanskrit meant literally 'blown out'.

In the 16th century a completely new set of meanings of *air* arrived in English: 'appearance' or 'demeanour'. The first known instance comes in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, IV, i: 'The quality and air of our attempt brooks no division' (1596). This *air* was borrowed from French, where it probably represents an earlier, Old French, *aire* 'nature, quality', whose original literal meaning 'place of origin' (reflected in another derivative, *eyrie*) takes it back to Latin *ager* 'place, field', source of English *agriculture* and related to *acre*. (The final syllable of English *debonair* [13] came from Old French *aire*, incidentally; the phrase *de bon aire* meant 'of good disposition'.)

The final strand in modern English *air* comes via the Italian descendant of Latin *āēr*, *aria*. This had absorbed the 'nature, quality' meanings of Old French *aire*, and developed them further to 'melody' (perhaps on the model of German *weise*, which means both 'way, manner' and 'tune' – its English cognate *wise*, as in 'in no wise', meant 'song' from the 11th to the 13th centuries). It seems likely that English *air* in the sense 'tune' is a direct translation of the Italian. Here again, Shakespeare got in with it first – in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I, i: 'Your tongue's sweet air more tunable than lark to shepherd's ear' (1590). (*Aria* itself became an English word in the 18th century.)

➧ ACRE, AEROPLANE, AGRICULTURE, ARIA, AURA, EYRIE, MALARIA, WIND

aisle [15] The original English form of this word was *ele*. It was borrowed from Old French, which in turn took it from Latin *āla* 'wing' (the modern French form of the word, *aile*, has a diminutive form, *aileron* 'movable control surface on an aircraft's wing' [20], which has been acquired by English). Besides meaning literally 'bird's wing', *āla* was used metaphorically for 'wing of a building', which was the source of its original meaning in English, the 'sides of the nave of a church'. The Latin word comes from an unrecorded **acsla*, which is one of a complex web of 'turning' words that include Latin *axis*, Greek *axon* 'axis', Latin *axilla* 'armpit' (whence English *axillary* and *axil*), and English *axle*.

The notion of an aisle as a detached, separate part of a building led to an association with *isle* and *island* which eventually affected Middle English *ele*'s spelling. From the 16th to the 18th century the word was usually spelled *ile* or *isle*. A further complication entered the picture in the 18th century in the form of French *aile*, which took the spelling on to today's settled form, *aisle*.

➧ AILERON, AXIS

ajar [16] *Ajar* comes from Scotland and Northern England. In Middle English times it was *a char* or *on char*, literally 'on turn' (*char* comes from an Old English word *cerr* 'turn', which in its metaphorical sense 'turn of work' has given modern English *charwoman* and *chore*). A door or window that was in the act of turning was therefore neither completely shut nor completely open. The first spellings with *j* occur in the 18th century.

➧ CHAR, CHARWOMAN

akimbo [15] *Akimbo* was borrowed from Old Norse. Its original English spelling (which occurs only

once, in the *Tale of Beryn* 1400) was *in kenebowe*, which suggests a probable Old Norse precursor **i keng boginn* (never actually discovered), meaning literally 'bent in a curve' (Old Norse *bogi* is related to English *bow*); hence the notion of the arms sticking out at the side, elbows bent. When the word next appears in English, in the early 17th century, it has become *on kenbow* or *a kenbo*, and by the 18th century *akimbo* has arrived.

BOW

alabaster [14] Chaucer was the first English author to use the word *alabaster*: in the *Knight's Tale* (1386) he writes of 'alabaster white and red coral'. It comes, via Old French and Latin, from Greek *alábast(r)os*, which may be of Egyptian origin. Scottish English used the variant from *alabast* until the 16th century (indeed, this may predate *alabaster* by a few years); and from the 16th to the 17th century the word was usually spelled *alablaster*, apparently owing to confusion with *arblaster* 'crossbowman'.

The use of alabaster for making marbles (of the sort used in children's games) gave rise to the abbreviation *alley, ally* 'marble' in the early 18th century.

alarm [14] *Alarm* was originally a call to arms. It comes from the Old Italian phrase *all' arme* 'to the weapons!' This was lexicalized as the noun *allarme*, which was borrowed into Old French as *alarme*, and thence into English. The archaic variant *alarum* seems to have arisen from an emphatic rolling of the *r* accompanying a prolongation of the final syllable when the word was used as an exclamation.

ARM

alas [13] In origin *alas* was an exclamation of weariness rather than grief. Latin *lassus* 'weary' (related to *let* 'allow' and source of *lassitude*) passed into Old French as *las* which, with the addition of the exclamation *a* 'ah', became *alas*.

LASSITUDE, LET

albatross [17] The word *albatross* has a confused history. The least uncertain thing about it is that until the late 17th century it was *alcatras*; the change of the first element to *alba*seems to have arisen from association of the albatross's white colour with Latin *albus* 'white'. However, which particular bird the alcatras was, and where the word *alcatras* ultimately came from, are much more dubious. The term was applied variously, over the 16th to the 19th centuries, to albatrosses, frigate birds, gannets, gulls, and pelicans. Its immediate source was Spanish and Portuguese *alcatraz* 'pelican' (hence *Alcatraz*, the prison-island in San Francisco Bay, USA, once the haunt of pelicans), which was clearly of Arabic origin, and it has been speculated that it comes from Arabic *al qādūs* 'the bucket', on the premise that the bucket of a water-wheel used for irrigation resembles a pelican's beak. Arabic *qādūs* itself comes from Greek *kádos* 'jar'.

albino [18] Like *album*, *albino* comes ultimately from Latin *albus* 'white'. It was borrowed into English from the Portuguese, who used it with reference to black Africans suffering from albinism (it is a derivative of *albo*, the Portuguese descendant of Latin *albus*).

ALBUM

album [17] Latin *albus* 'white' has been the source of a variety of English words: *alb* 'ecclesiastical tunic' [OE], *albedo* 'reflective power' [19], *Albion* [13], an old word for *Britain*, probably with reference to its white cliffs, *albumen* 'white of egg' [16], and *auburn*, as well as *albino*. *Album* is a

nominalization of the neuter form of the adjective, which was used in classical times for a blank, or white, tablet on which public notices were inscribed. Its original adoption in the modern era seems to have been in Germany, where scholars kept an *album amicorum* 'album of friends' in which to collect colleagues' signatures. This notion of an autograph book continues in Dr Johnson's definition of *album* in his *Dictionary* 1755: 'a book in which foreigners have long been accustomed to insert the autographs of celebrated people', but gradually it became a repository for all sorts of souvenirs, including in due course photographs.

ALB, ALBEDO, ALBINO, ALBUMEN, AUBURN, DAUB

alchemy [14] *Alchemy* comes, via Old French *alkemie* and medieval Latin *alchimia*, from Arabic *alkīmiā*. Broken down into its component parts, this represents Arabic *al* 'the' and *kīmiā*, a word borrowed by Arabic from Greek *khēmíā* 'alchemy' – that is, the art of transmuting base metals into gold. (It has been suggested that *khēmiā* is the same word as *Khēmiā*, the ancient name for Egypt, on the grounds that alchemy originated in Egypt, but it seems more likely that it derives from Greek *khūmós* 'fluid' – source of English *chyme* [17] – itself based on the verb *khein* 'pour'). Modern English *chemistry* comes not directly from Greek *khēmiā*, but from *alchemy*, with the loss of the first syllable.

CHEMISTRY, CHYME

alcohol [16] Originally, alcohol was a powder, not a liquid. The word comes from Arabic *al-kuhul*, literally 'the kohl' – that is, powdered antimony used as a cosmetic for darkening the eyelids. This was borrowed into English via French or medieval Latin, and retained this 'powder' meaning for some centuries (for instance, 'They put between the eyelids and the eye a certain black powder made of a mineral brought from the kingdom of Fez, and called Alcohol', George Sandys, *Travels* 1615). But a change was rapidly taking place: from specifically 'antimony', *alcohol* came to mean any substance obtained by sublimation, and hence 'quintessence'. *Alcohol of wine* was thus the 'quintessence of wine', produced by distillation or rectification, and by the middle of the 18th century *alcohol* was being used on its own for the intoxicating ingredient in strong liquor. The more precise chemical definition (a compound with a hydroxyl group bound to a hydrocarbon group) developed in the 19th century.

KOHL

alcove [17] *Alcove* is of Arabic origin. It reached English, via French *alcôve* and Spanish *alcoba* (where it means 'recessed area for a bed'), from Arabic *al-qobbah* 'the arch, the vault', hence 'the vaulted room', which was derived from the verb *qubba* 'vault'.

alder [OE] *Alder* is an ancient tree-name, represented in several other Indo-European languages, including German *erle*, Dutch *els*, Polish *olcha*, Russian *ol'khá*, and Latin *alnus* (which is the genus name of the alder in scientific classification). *Alder* is clearly the odd man out amongst all these forms in having a *d*, but it was not always so; the Old English word was *alor*, and the intrusive *d* does not begin to appear until the 14th century (it acts as a sort of connecting or glide consonant between the *l* and the following vowel, in much the same way as Old English *thunor* adopted a *d* to become *thunder*). The place-name *Aldershot* is based on the tree *alder*.

alderman [OE] *Alderman* preserves the notion that those who are old (the 'elders') are automatically in charge. In Anglo-Saxon England the *ealdor* was the chief of a family or clan, by virtue of seniority (the word is based on the adjective *eald* 'old'). *Alderman* (Old English *ealdorman*) was a

political title or rank adopted probably in the early 8th century for someone who exercised in society at large an authority equivalent to that of the *ealdor*. In effect, this meant that an alderman acted as a sort of viceroy to the king in a particular district. In the 12th century the title became applied to the governor of a guild, and as the guilds gradually took over some functions of local government, an alderman became a senior councillor. The title was officially abolished in Britain in 1974.

OLD

ale [OE] Old English *ealu* 'ale' goes back to a Germanic root **aluth-*, which also produced Old Norse *öl* (Scandinavian languages still use *ale*related words, whereas other Germanic languages now only use *beer*-related words; English is the only one to retain both). Going beyond Germanic in time takes us back to the word's ultimate Indo-European source, a base meaning 'bitter' which is also represented in *alum* and *aluminium*. *Ale* and *beer* seem to have been virtually synonymous to the Anglo-Saxons; various distinctions in usage have developed over the centuries, such as that ale is made without hops, and is heavier (or some would say lighter) than beer, but most of the differences have depended on local usage.

The word *bridal* is intimately connected with *ale*. Nowadays used as an adjective, and therefore subconsciously associated with other adjectives ending in *-al*, in Old English it was a noun, literally 'bride ale', that is, a beer-drinking session to celebrate a marriage.

alert [17] *Alert* comes, via French, from an Italian phrase *all' erta* 'on the look-out', or literally 'at the (*alla*) watch-tower (*erta*)'. *Erta* was short for *torre erta*, literally 'high tower', in which the adjective *erta* 'high' came ultimately from Latin *ērectus*, the past participle of *erigere* 'raise'.

ERECT

alexandrine [16] An alexandrine is a line of verse of 12 syllables, characteristic of the classic French drama of the 17th century. The term derives from the use of this metre in *Alexandre*, a 12th-or 13th-century Old French romance about Alexander the Great.

alfresco see FRESH

algebra [16] *Algebra* symbolizes the debt of Western culture to Arab mathematics, but ironically when it first entered the English language it was used as a term for the setting of broken bones, and even sometimes for the fractures themselves ('The helpes of Algebra and of dislocations', Robert Copland, *Formulary of Guydo in surgery* 1541). This reflects the original literal meaning of the Arabic term *al jebr*, 'the reuniting of broken parts', from the verb *jabara* 'reunite'. The anatomical connotations of this were adopted when the word was borrowed, as *algebra*, into Spanish, Italian, and medieval Latin, from one or other of which English acquired it. In Arabic, however, it had long been applied to the solving of algebraic equations (the full Arabic expression was *'ilm aljebr wa'lmuqābalah* 'the science of reunion and equation', and the mathematician al-Khwarizmi used *aljebr* as the title of his treatise on algebra – see ALGORITHM), and by the end of the 16th century this was firmly established as the central meaning of *algebra* in English.

algorithm [13] *Algorithm* comes from the name of an Arab mathematician, in full Abu Ja far Mohammed ibn-Musa al-Khwarizmi (c. 780–c. 850), who lived and taught in Baghdad and whose works in translation introduced Arabic numerals to the West. The last part of his name means literally 'man from Khwarizm', a town on the borders of Turkmenistan, now called Khiva.

The Arabic system of numeration and calculation, based on 10, of which he was the chief

exponent, became known in Arabic by his name – *al-khwarizmi*. This was borrowed into medieval Latin as *algorismus* (with the Arabic *-izmi* transformed into the Latin suffix *-ismus* '-ism'). In Old French *algorismus* became *augorime*, which was the basis of the earliest English form of the word, *augrim*. From the 14th century onwards, Latin influence gradually led to the adoption of the spelling *algorism* in English. This remains the standard form of the word when referring to the Arabic number system; but in the late 17th century an alternative version, *algorithm*, arose owing to association with Greek *árithmos* 'number' (source of *arithmetic* [13]), and this became established from the 1930s onwards as the term for a step-by-step mathematical procedure, as used in computing.

Algol, the name of a computer programming language, was coined in the late 1950s from '*alg*orithmic *l*anguage'.

ALLEGORY, ALLERGY, ARITHMETIC

alibi [18] In Latin, *alibi* means literally 'somewhere else'. It is the locative form (that is, the form expressing place) of the pronoun *alius* 'other' (which is related to Greek *allos* 'other' and English *else*). When first introduced into English it was used in legal contexts as an adverb, meaning, as in Latin, 'elsewhere': 'The prisoner had little to say in his defence; he endeavoured to prove himself Alibi', John Arbuthnot, *Law is a bottomless pit* 1727. But by the end of the 18th century it had become a noun, 'plea of being elsewhere at the time of a crime'. The more general sense of an 'excuse' developed in the 20th century.

Another legal offspring of Latin *alius* is *alias*. This was a direct 16th-century borrowing of Latin *ali*$\bar{a}$*s*, a form of *alius* meaning 'otherwise'.

ALIAS, ELSE

alien [14] The essential notion contained in *alien* is of 'otherness'. Its ultimate source is Latin *alius* 'other' (which is related to English *else*). From this was formed a Latin adjective *ali*$\bar{e}$*nus* 'belonging to another person or place', which passed into English via Old French *alien*. In Middle English an alternative version *alient* arose (in the same way as *ancient*, *pageant*, and *tyrant* came from earlier *ancien*, *pagin*, and *tyran*), but this died out during the 17th century. The verb *alienate* 'estrange' or 'transfer to another's ownership' entered the language in the mid 16th century, eventually replacing an earlier verb *alien* (source of *alienable* and *inalienable*).

ALIBI, ELSE

alike [OE] *Alike* is an ancient word whose ultimate Germanic source, **gal*$\bar{\imath}$*kam*, meant something like 'associated form' (**l*$\bar{\imath}$*kam* 'form, body' produced German *leiche* 'corpse' and Old English *lic*, from which we get *lychgate*, the churchyard gate through which a funeral procession passes; and the collective prefix **ga*meant literally 'with' or 'together'). In Old English, **gal*$\bar{\imath}$*kam* had become *gel*$\bar{\imath}$*c*, which developed into Middle English *ilik*; and from the 14th century onwards the prefix *i-*, which was becoming progressively rarer in English, was assimilated to the more familiar *a*.

The verb *like* is indirectly related to *alike*, and the adjective, adverb, preposition, and conjunction *like* was formed directly from it, with the elimination of the prefix.

EACH, LIKE

alimony [17] *Alimony* is an anglicization of Latin *alim*$\bar{o}$*nia*, which is based on the verb *alere* 'nourish' (source of *alma* 'bounteous', as in *alma mater*, and of *alumnus*). This in turn goes back to a

hypothetical root *al-, which is also the basis of English *adolescent*, *adult*, *altitude* (from Latin *altus* 'high'), and *old*. The original sense 'nourishment, sustenance' has now died out, but the specialized 'support for a former wife' is of equal antiquity in English.

The *-mony* element in the word represents Latin *-mōnia*, a fairly meaning-free suffix used for forming nouns from verbs (it is related to *-ment*, which coincidentally was also combined with *alere*, to form *alimentary*), but in the later 20th century it took on a newly productive role in the sense 'provision of maintenance for a former partner'. *Palimony* 'provision for a former non-married partner' was coined around 1979, and in the 1980s appeared *dallymony* 'provision for somebody one has jilted'.

▶ ADULT, ALTITUDE, ALUMNUS, OLD

alive [OE] *Alive* comes from the Old English phrase *on life*, literally 'on life'. *Līfe* was the dative case of *līf* 'life'; between two vowels *f* was pronounced /v/ in Old English, hence the distinction in modern English pronunciation between *life* and *alive*.

▶ LIFE

alkali [14] English acquired *alkali* via Latin from Arabic *al-qalīy* 'the ashes', a derivative of the verb *qalay* 'fry'. The implicit reference is to the plant saltwort (Latin name *Salsola kali*), which was burnt to obtain its alkaline ashes (Chaucer's canon's yeoman, the alchemist's assistant, mentions it: 'Salt tartre, alcaly, and salt preparat, And combust matieres, and coagulat', 1386). The modern chemical sense of a compound which combines with an acid to form a salt was first used in 1813, by the chemist Sir Humphry Davy.

all [OE] Words related to *all* are found throughout the Germanic languages (German *all*, Dutch *al*, Old Norse *allr*, Gothic *alls*, for instance). They can probably all be traced back to a hypothetical Germanic ancestor *alnaz. Connections outside Germanic are not known, unless Lithuanian *aliai* 'completely' is a relative.

allay [OE] In Old English, *alecgan* meant literally 'lay aside' (*-a* 'away, aside, out', *lecgan* 'lay'). The more recent senses 'relieve, mitigate' developed from the 13th to the 15th centuries owing to the influence of two formally similar Old French verbs: *aleger* 'lighten' (from Latin *alleviāre*, source of English *alleviate* [15]); and *al(e)ier* 'qualify, moderate' (source of English *alloy*).

▶ LAY

allege [14] *Allege* is related to *law*, *legal*, *legislation*, *legation*, and *litigation*. Its original source was Vulgar Latin **exlitigāre*, which meant 'clear of charges in a lawsuit' (from *ex-*'out of' and *litigāre* 'litigate'). This developed successively into Old French *esligier* and Anglo-Norman *alegier*, from where it was borrowed into English; there, its original meaning was 'make a declaration before a legal tribunal'. Early traces of the notion of making an assertion without proof can be detected within 50 years of the word's introduction into English, but it took a couple of centuries to develop fully.

The hard *g* of *allegation* suggests that though it is ultimately related to *allege*, it comes from a slightly different source: Latin *allēgātiō*, from *allēgāre* 'adduce', a compound verb formed from *ad-* 'to' and *lēgāre* 'charge' (source of English *legate* and *legation*).

▶ LAW, LEGAL, LEGATION, LEGISLATION, LITIGATION

allegory [14] Etymologically, *allegory* means 'speaking otherwise'. It comes from a Greek compound

based on *allos* 'other' (which is related to Latin *alius*, as in English *alibi* and *alias*, and to English *else*) and *agoreúein* 'speak publicly' (derived from *agorá* '(place of) assembly', which is the source of English *agoraphobia* and is related to *gregarious*). Greek *allegorein* 'speak figuratively' produced the noun *allēgorīā*, which passed into English via Latin and French.

AGGREGATE, AGORAPHOBIA, ALIAS, ALIBI, ELSE, GREGARIOUS

allergy [20] *Allergy* was borrowed from German *allergie*, which was coined in 1906 by the scientist C E von Pirquet. He formed it from Greek *allos* 'other, different' and *érgon* 'work' (source of English *energy* and related to English *work*). Its original application was to a changed physiological condition caused by an injection of some foreign substance.

ENERGY, WORK

alley [14] *Alley* is related to French *aller* 'go'. Old French *aler* (which came from Latin *ambulare* 'walk', source of English *amble* and *ambulance*) produced the derived noun *alee* 'act of walking', hence 'place where one walks, passage'.

AMBLE, AMBULANCE

alligator [16] The Spanish, on encountering the alligator in America, called it *el lagarto* 'the lizard'. At first English adopted simply the noun ('In this river we killed a monstrous Lagarto or Crocodile', Job Hortop, *The trauailes of an Englishman* 1568), but before the end of the 16th century the Spanish definite article *el* had been misanalysed as part of the noun – hence, *alligator*. Spanish *lagarto* derived from Latin *lacerta* 'lizard', which, via Old French *lesard*, gave English *lizard*.

LIZARD

alliteration [17] *Alliteration* is an anglicization of *alliterātiō*, a modern Latin coinage based on the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *litera* 'letter' – from the notion of an accumulation of words beginning with the same letter. The verb *alliterate* is an early 19th-century back-formation from *alliteration*.

LETTER

allopathy see HOMEOPATHY

allow [14] *Allow* comes ultimately from two completely different Latin verbs, *allaudāre* and *allocāre*, which became blended in Old French *alouer*. The first, *allaudāre*, was based on *laudare* 'praise' (source of English *laud*, *laudable*, and *laudatory*); the second, *allocāre* (source of English *allocate* [17]) on *locāre* 'place'. The formal similarity of the Latin verbs gradually drew their meanings closer together. The notion of 'placing', and hence 'allotting' or 'assigning', developed via the now obsolete 'place to somebody's credit' to 'take into account, admit'. Meanwhile, the idea of 'praising' moved through 'commending' or 'approving' to 'accepting as true or valid', and ultimately to 'permitting'.

ALLOCATE, LAUDABLE, LOCATION

alloy [16] The notion of 'mixing' in *alloy* originated in the idea of 'binding' in Latin *ligāre* 'tie' (source of English *ligament*, *ligature*, and *lien* – via Old French *loien* from Latin *ligāmen* 'bond'). Addition of the prefix *ad-* gave *alligāre* 'bind one thing to another', hence 'combine'. This passed into Old French as *aleier*, where it eventually became *aloier* – hence English *alloy*.

ALLY, LIEN, LIGAMENT, LIGATURE

allusion see ILLUSION

alluvial [19] Alluvial material is material that has been washed down and deposited by running water. Hence the term; for its ultimate source, Latin *lavere* (a variant of *lavāre*, which produced English *latrine*, *laundry*, *lava*, *lavatory*, *lavish*, and *lotion*), meant 'wash'. Addition of the prefix *ad-* 'to' changed *lavere* to *luere*, giving *alluere* 'wash against'. Derived from this were the noun *alluviō* (source of the English technical term *alluvion* 'alluvium') and the adjective *alluvius*, whose neuter form *alluvium* became a noun meaning 'material deposited by running water'. English adopted *alluvium* in the 17th century, and created the adjective *alluvial* from it in the 19th century.

If Latin *alluere* meant 'wash against', *abluere* meant 'wash away'. Its noun form was *ablūtiō*, which English acquired as *ablution* in the 14th century.

ABLUTION, LATRINE, LAUNDRY, LAVATORY, LAVISH, LOTION

ally [13] The verb *ally* was borrowed into English from Old French *alier*, an alteration of *aleier* (a different development of the Old French word was *aloier*, which English acquired as *alloy*). This came from Latin *alligāre* 'bind one thing to another', a derivative of *ligāre* 'tie'; hence the idea etymologically contained in being 'allied' is of having a bond with somebody else.

The noun *ally* seems originally to have been independently borrowed from Old French *allié* in the 14th century, with the meaning 'relative'. The more common modern sense, 'allied person or country', appeared in the 15th century, and is probably a direct derivative of the English verb.

ALLOY, LIGAMENT

alma mater [17] *Alma mater* literally means 'mother who fosters or nourishes'. The Latin adjective *almus* 'giving nourishment', derives from the verb *alere* 'nourish' (source of English *alimony* and *alimentary*). The epithet *alma mater* was originally applied by the Romans to a number of goddesses whose particular province was abundance, notably Ceres and Cybele. In the 17th century it began to be used in English with reference to a person's former school or college, thought of as a place of intellectual and spiritual nourishment (Alexander Pope was amongst its earliest users, although the reference is far from kind: 'Proceed, great days! 'till Learning fly the shore ... 'Till Isis' Elders reel, their pupils' sport, And Alma mater lie dissolv'd in Port!' *Dunciad* 1718).

If that which nourishes is *almus*, those who are nourished are *alumni* (similarly derived from the verb *alere*). *Alumnus* was first applied in English to a pupil – and more specifically a former pupil or graduate – in the 17th century; an early reference combines the notions of *alumnus* and *alma mater*: 'Lieutenant Governor ... promised his Interposition for them, as become such an Alumnus to such an Alma Mater', William Sewall's *Diary* 12 October 1696. The first example of the feminine form, *alumna*, comes in the 1880s.

ALIMENTARY, ALIMONY, ALUMNUS

almanac [14] One of the first recorded uses of *almanac* in English is by Chaucer in his *Treatise on the astrolabe* 1391: 'A table of the verray Moeuyng of the Mone from howre to howre, every day and in every signe, after thin Almenak'. At that time an almanac was specifically a table of the movements and positions of the sun, moon, and planets, from which astronomical calculations could be made; other refinements and additions, such as a calendar, came to be included over succeeding centuries. The earliest authenticated reference to an almanac comes in the (Latin) works of the English scientist Roger Bacon, in the mid 13th century. But the ultimate source of

the word is obscure. Its first syllable, *al-*, and its general relevance to medieval science and technology, strongly suggest an Arabic origin, but no convincing candidate has been found.

almond [13] The *l* in *almond* is a comparatively recent addition; its immediate source, Latin *amandula*, did not have one (and nor, correspondingly, do French *amande*, Portuguese *amendoa*, Italian *mandola*, or German *mandel*). But the relative frequency of the prefix *al-* in Latin-derived words seems to have prompted its grafting on to *amandula* in its passage from Latin to Old French, giving a hypothetical **almandle* and eventually *al(e)mande*. French in due course dropped the *l*, but English acquired the word when it was still there.

Going further back in time, the source of *amandula* was Latin *amygdula*, of which it was an alteration, and *amygdula* in turn was borrowed from the Greek word for 'almond', *amygdal.*. The Latin and Greek forms have been reborrowed into English at a much later date in various scientific terms: *amygdala*, for instance, an almond-shaped mass of nerve tissue in the brain; *amygdalin*, a glucoside found in bitter almonds; and *amygdaloid*, a rock with almond-shaped cavities.

almoner see ALMS

almost [OE] *Almost* is simply a combination of *all* and *most*. In Anglo-Saxon times, and up until the 17th century, it meant 'mostly all' or 'nearly all' (thus one could say 'My best friends are almost men', meaning most of them are men); but already by the 13th century the modern sense 'nearly, not quite' was well in place.

▶ ALL, MOST

alms [OE] The word *alms* has become much reduced in its passage through time from its ultimate Greek source, *eleēmosúnē* 'pity, alms'. This was borrowed into post-classical (Christian) Latin as *eleēmosyna*, which subsequently became simplified in Vulgar Latin to **alimosina* (source of the word for 'alms' in many Romance languages, such as French *aumône* and Italian *limosina*). At this stage Germanic borrowed it, and in due course dispersed it (German *almosen*, Dutch *aalmoes*). It entered Old English as *ælmesse*, which became reduced in Middle English to *almes* and finally by the 17th century to *alms* (which because of its *-s* had come to be regarded as a plural noun). The original Greek *eleēmosúnē* is itself a derivative, of the adjective *eleémon* 'compassionate', which in turn came from the noun *éleos* 'pity'.

From medieval Latin *eleēmosyna* was derived the adjective *eleēmosynarius* (borrowed into English in the 17th century as the almost unpronounceable *eleemosynary* 'giving alms'). Used as a noun, this passed into Old French as *a(u)lmonier*, and eventually, in the 13th century, became English *aumoner* 'giver of alms'. The modern sense of *almoner* as a hospital social worker did not develop until the end of the 19th century.

▶ ALMONER, ELEEMOSYNARY

alone [13] Although partly disguised by its pronunciation, *alone* is in fact simply a compound of *all* and *one* (whose /wun/ pronunciation began to develop around the 15th century). In Old English it was a completely separate phrase, *allāna*, literally 'completely by oneself', but by the 13th century this had coalesced into a single word. Loss of its initial *a* in the 14th century gave rise to the adjective *lone*.

▶ ALL, LONE, ONE

along [OE] The *a-* in *along* is related to the prefix *anti-*, and the original notion contained in the word

is of 'extending a long way in the opposite direction'. This was the force of Old English *andlang*, a compound formed from *and*-'against, facing' (whose original source was Greek *anti*- 'against') and *lang* 'long'. The meaning gradually changed via simply 'extending a long way', through 'continuous' and 'the whole length of something' to 'lengthwise'. At the same time the *and*- prefix was gradually losing its identity: by the 10th century the forms *anlong* and *onlong* were becoming established, and the 14th century saw the beginnings of modern English *along*.

But there is another *along* entirely, nowadays dialectal. Used in the phrase *along of* 'with' (as in 'Come along o'me!'), it derives from Old English *gelong* 'pertaining, dependent'. This was a compound formed from the prefix *ge*, suggesting suitability, and *long*, of which the notions of 'pertaining' and 'appropriateness' are preserved in modern English *belong*.

LONG

aloof [16] *Aloof* was originally a nautical term, a command to steer to windward. Its second syllable is a variant of *luff* 'sail closer to the wind' [13]. This was borrowed from Old French *lof*, 'windward side of a ship', which may itself have been, like so many maritime expressions, of Dutch origin. The modern figurative meaning 'reserved, uninvolved' developed via an intermediate physical sense 'away, at a distance'.

LUFF

alopecia [14] This word appears to derive from the resemblance observed by the Greeks between baldness in human beings and mange in foxes. The Greek for 'fox' was *alōpēx*, hence *alōpekía*, borrowed into Latin as *alopēcia*. *Alōpēx* is related to Latin *vulpēs* 'fox', from which English gets *vulpine* 'foxlike' [17].

VULPINE

aloud [14] *Aloud* was formed in Middle English from the adjective *loud* and the prefix *a*-, as in *abroad*; it does not appear to have had a direct Old English antecedent **on loud*. Its opposite, *alow* 'quietly', did not survive the 15th century.

LOUD

alpaca [18] English gets the term *alpaca* (for a South American animal related to the llama) from Spanish, which in turn got it from *alpako*, the word for the animal in the Aymara language of Bolivia and Peru. *Alpako* was a derivative of the adjective *pako* 'reddish-brown', a reference to the colour of the animal's hair.

alphabet [15] This word is based on the names of the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, *alpha* and *beta*, standing for the whole. It derives from Greek *alphabētos*, via Latin *alphabētum*. When it first came into English, purists tried to insist that it should be reserved for the Greek alphabet, and that the English alphabet should be referred to by the term *ABC* (which had been lexicalized in various forms, such as *abece*, *apece*, and *absee*, since the late 13th century), but, like most such prescriptive demands, this was a waste of breath and ink.

Alsatian [17] *Alsatian* has been around since at least the late 17th century (although in early use it generally denoted not the Franco-German border province of Alsace but a no-go area in London, near the banks of the Thames, where criminals, vagabonds and prostitutes hung out, which was nicknamed 'Alsatia' because of the real Alsace's reputation as a harbour for the disaffected). It really came into its own, however, during World War I. A breed of dog known as the 'German sheepdog' or 'German shepherd dog' (German *deutscher Schäferhund*) had been introduced into

Britain, but understandably, between 1914 and 1918 its stock fell considerably. When it was reintroduced after the war it was thought politic to give it a less inflammatory name, so it became officially the 'Alsatian wolf-dog' (even though it has nothing to do with Alsace, and there is no element of wolf in its genetic make-up). It continued to be called the German shepherd in the USA, and in the latter part of the 20th century that usage crept back into Britain.

also [OE] *Also* was a late Old English compound formed from *all* 'exactly, even' and *swa* 'so'; it meant 'in just this way, thus', and hence (recalling the meaning of German *also* 'therefore') 'similarly'. These two uses died out in, respectively, the 15th and 17th centuries, but already by the 13th century 'similarly' was developing into the current sense 'in addition'. *As* came from *also* in the 12th century.

In Old English, the notion of 'in addition' now expressed by *also* was verbalized as *eke*.

➧ AS

altar [OE] The etymological notion underlying the word *altar* is that of sacrificial burning. Latin *altar*, which was borrowed directly into Old English, was a derivative of the plural noun *altāria*, 'burnt offerings', which probably came from the verb *adolēre* 'burn up'. *Adolēre* in turn appears to be a derivative of *olēre* 'smell' (the connection being the smell made by combustion), which is related to English *odour*, *olfactory*, and *redolent*. (The traditional view that *altar* derives from Latin *altus* 'high' is no longer generally accepted, although no doubt it played a part, by association, in its development.)

In Middle English, the Old French form *auter* replaced *altar*, but in the 16th century the Latin form re-established itself.

➧ ODOUR, OLFACTORY, REDOLENT

alter [14] *Alter* comes from the Latin word for 'other (of two)', *alter*. In late Latin a verb was derived from this, *alterāre*, which English acquired via French *altérer*. Latin *alter* (which also gave French *autre* and English *alternate* [16], *alternative* [17], *altercation* [14], and *altruism*, not to mention *alter ego*) was formed from the root **al-* (source of Latin *alius* – from which English gets *alien*, *alias*, and *alibi* – Greek *allos* 'other', and English *else*) and the comparative suffix **-tero-*, which occurs also in English *other*. Hence the underlying meaning of Latin *alter* (and, incidentally, of English *other*) is 'more other', with the implication of alternation between the two.

➧ ALIAS, ALIEN, ALTERNATIVE, ALTRUISM, ELSE

altitude see OLD

altruism [19] Etymologically as well as semantically, *altruism* contains the notion of 'other people'. It was borrowed from French *altruisme*, which was apparently coined in 1830 by the philosopher Auguste Comte on the basis of Italian *altrui* 'that which belongs to other people'. This was the oblique case of *altro* 'other', from Latin *alter*. Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* suggests that the coinage was based on such French legal phrases as *le bien d'autrui* 'the welfare of others' and *le droit d'autrui* 'the rights of others' (*autrui* corresponds to Italian *altrui*).

➧ ALIAS, ALTER, ELSE

aluminium [19] *Aluminium* comes from a coinage by the English chemist Sir Humphry Davy, who discovered the metal. His first suggestion was *alumium*, which he put forward in Volume 98 of the *Transactions of the Royal Society* 1808: 'Had I been so fortunate as ... to have procured the metallic

substances I was in search of, I should have proposed for them the names of silicium, alumium, zirconium, and glucium'. He based it on Latin *alūmen* 'alum' (alum is a sulphate of aluminium, and the word *alum*, a 14th-century borrowing from French, derives ultimately from *alūmen*; alumina is an oxide of aluminium, and the word *alumina* is a modern Latin formation based on *alūmen*, which entered English at the end of the 18th century); and *alūmen* may be linked with Latin *alūta* 'skins dried for making leather, using alum'.

Davy soon changed his mind, however, and in 1812 put forward the term *aluminum* – which remains the word used in American English to this day. British English, though, has preferred the form *aluminium*, which was mooted contemporaneously with *aluminum* on grounds of classical 'correctness': 'Aluminium, for so we shall take the liberty of writing the word, in preference to aluminum, which has a less classical sound', *Quarterly Review* 1812.

▶ ALUM

alumnus see ALMA MATER

always [13] In Old English, the expression was *alne weg*, literally 'all the way'. It seems likely that this was used originally in the physical sense of 'covering the complete distance', but by the time it starts to appear in texts (King Alfred's is the first recorded use, in his translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* around 888) it already meant 'perpetually'. *Alway* survived into modern English, albeit as an archaism, but began to be replaced as the main form by *always* in the 12th century. The final *-s* is genitive, not plural, and was originally added to *all* as well as *way*: *alles weis*. It has a generalizing force, much as in modern English one might say *of a morning* for 'every morning'.

▶ WAY

Alzheimer's disease [20] This serious brain disorder was first described in a scientific journal in 1912, and was given its name in honour of the German neurologist Alois Alzheimer (1864–1915). For many decades the term was largely confined to specialist medical journals, but in the 1970s, as the disease became better known, it seeped into the public domain.

amalgamate [17] *Amalgamate* is a derivative of *amalgam*, a term for an alloy of mercury and another metal (now usually used for tooth fillings) borrowed into English from French or medieval Latin in the 15th century. Latin (*amalagama*) probably acquired the word from the Greek adjective *málagma* 'softening', a derivative of the verb *malássein* 'soften', which is a distant relative of English *malleable* (see MALLET).

amanuensis see MANUAL

amateur [18] Etymologically, an amateur is simply a 'lover'. That is what its ultimate Latin ancestor *amator* meant, and indeed in English it still denoted 'someone who loves or is fond of something' until well into the 19th century ('am no amateur of these melons', Mrs Atkinson, *Tartar Steppes* 1863). However, its immediate source, French *amateur*, had already evolved the subsidiary sense 'one who does something solely for the enjoyment, not for payment', and that is now its only English meaning.

amaze [OE] Old English *āmasian* meant 'stupefy' or 'stun', with perhaps some reminiscences of an original sense 'stun by hitting on the head' still adhering to it. Some apparently related forms in Scandinavian languages, such as Swedish *masa* 'be sluggish' and Norwegian dialect *masast* 'become unconscious', suggest that it may originally have been borrowed from Old Norse. The modern

sense 'astonish' did not develop until the end of the 16th century; Shakespeare was one of its earliest exponents: 'Crystal eyes, whose full perfection all the world amazes', *Venus and Adonis* 1592.

By the end of the 13th century both the verb and its related noun had developed a form without the initial *a-*, and in the late 14th century the word – *maze* – had begun to be applied to a deliberately confusing structure.

MAZE

ambassador [14] Appropriately enough, *ambassador* is a highly cosmopolitan word. It was borrowed back and forth among several European languages before arriving in English. Its ultimate source appears to be the Indo-European root **ag-* 'drive, lead', whose other numerous offspring include English *act* and *agent*. With the addition of the prefix **amb-*'around' (as in *ambidextrous*), this produced in the Celtic languages of Gaul the noun *ambactos*, which was borrowed by Latin as *ambactus* 'vassal'. The Latin word then found its way into the Germanic languages – Old English had *ambeht* 'servant, messenger', Old High German *ambaht* (from which modern German gets *amt* 'official position') – from which it was later borrowed back into medieval Latin as *ambactia*. This seems to have formed the basis of a verb, **ambactiārе* 'go on a mission' (from which English ultimately gets *embassy*), from which in turn was derived the noun **ambactiātor*. This became *ambasciator* in Old Italian, from which Old French borrowed it as *ambassadeur*. The word had a be wildering array of spellings in Middle English (such as *ambaxadour* and *inbassetour*) before finally settling down as *ambassador* in the 16th century.

EMBASSY

amber [14] *Amber* was borrowed, via Old French, from Arabic *'anbar*, which originally meant 'ambergris' (and in fact until the early 18th century *amber* was used for 'ambergris' too). A perceived resemblance between the two substances had already led in Arabic to 'amber' ousting 'ambergris' as the main meaning of *'anbar*, and this was reflected as soon as English acquired it.

In Scotland until as recently as the early 19th century *lamber* was the usual form. This arose from borrowing the French word for 'amber' complete with its definite article *le*: *l'ambre*.

Before the introduction of the Arabic term into European languages, the ancestor of modern English *glass* appears to have been the word used for 'amber'.

AMBERGRIS

ambergris [15] The original term for ambergris (a waxy material from the stomach of the sperm whale) was *amber*. But as confusion began to arise between the two substances amber and ambergris, *amber* came to be used for both in all the languages that had borrowed it from Arabic, thus compounding the bewilderment. The French solution was to differentiate ambergris as *ambre gris*, literally 'grey amber', and this eventually became the standard English term. (Later on, the contrastive term *ambre jaune* 'yellow amber' was coined for 'amber' in French.)

Uncertainty over the identity of the second element, *-gris*, has led to some fanciful reformulations of the word. In the 17th century, many people thought ambergris came from Greece – hence spellings such as *amber-de-grece* and *amber-greece*. And until comparatively recently its somewhat greasy consistency encouraged the spelling *ambergrease*.

AMBER

ambidextrous [16] *Ambidextrous* means literally 'right-handed on both sides'. It was formed in Latin from the prefix *ambi-* 'both' and the adjective *dexter* 'right-handed' (source of English *dextrous*). *Ambi-* corresponds to the Latin adjective *ambo* 'both', which derived ultimately from the Indo-European base **amb-*'around' (an element in the source of *ambassador* and *embassy*). The second element in Latin *ambo* seems to correspond to Old English *ba* 'both', which is related to modern English *both*.

Other English words formed with the prefix *amb(i)-* include *ambient* [16] (which came, like *ambition*, from Latin *ambire* 'go round'), *ambit* [16] (from Latin *ambitus* 'circuit'), *ambiguous, ambition, amble*, and *ambulance*.

DEXTROUS

ambiguous [16] *Ambiguous* carries the etymological notion of 'wandering around uncertainly'. It comes ultimately from the Latin compound verb *ambigere*, which was formed from the prefix *ambi-* (as in AMBIDEXTROUS) and the verb *agere* 'drive, lead' (a prodigious source of English words, including *act* and *agent*). From the verb was derived the adjective *ambiguus*, which was borrowed directly into English. The first to use it seems to have been Sir Thomas More: 'if it were now doubtful and ambiguous whether the church of Christ were in the right rule of doctrine or not' *A dialogue concerning heresies* 1528.

ACT, AGENT

ambition [14] Like *ambient*, *ambition* comes ultimately from the Latin compound verb *ambīre* 'go round' (formed from the prefix *ambi-*, as in AMBIDEXTROUS, and the verb *īre* 'go', which also gave English *exit*, *initial*, and *itinerant*). But while *ambient*, a 16th-century acquisition, remains fairly faithful to the literal meaning of the verb, *ambition* depends on a more metaphorical use. It seems that the verb's nominal derivative, *ambitiō*, developed connotations of 'going around soliciting votes' – 'canvassing', in fact – and hence, figuratively, of 'seeking favour or honour'. When the word was first borrowed into English, via Old French *ambition*, it had distinctly negative associations of 'greed for success' (Reginald Pecock writes of 'Vices [such] as pride, ambition, vainglory', *The repressor of overmuch blaming of the clergy* 1449), but by the 18th century it was a more respectable emotion.

EXIT, INITIAL, ITINERANT

amble [14] The ultimate source of *amble* (and of *perambulator* [17], and thus of its abbreviation *pram* [19]) is the Latin verb *ambulāre* 'walk'. This was a compound verb, formed from the prefix *ambi-* (as in AMBIDEXTROUS) and the base **el-* 'go', which also lies behind *exile* and *alacrity* [15] (from Latin *alacer* 'lively, eager', a compound of the base **el-* and *ācer* 'sharp' – source of English *acid*). Latin *ambulāre* developed into Provençal *amblar*, which eventually reached English via Old French *ambler*. At first the English word was used for referring to a particular (leisurely) gait of a horse, and it was not until the end of the 16th century that it began to be used of people.

ACID, ALACRITY, EXILE, PERAMBULATOR

ambulance [19] Originally, *ambulance* was a French term for a field hospital – that is, one set up at a site convenient for a battlefield, and capable of being moved on to the next battlefield when the army advanced (or retreated). In other words, it was an itinerant hospital, and the ultimate source of the term is the Latin verb *ambulāre* 'walk' (as in *amble*). The earliest recorded term for

such a military hospital in French was the 17th-century *hôpital ambulatoire*. This was later replaced by *hôpital ambulant*, literally 'walking hospital', and finally, at the end of the 18th century, by *ambulance*. This sense of the word had died out by the late 19th century, but already its attributive use, in phrases such as *ambulance cart* and *ambulance wagon*, had led to its being used for a vehicle for carrying the wounded or sick.

ACID, ALACRITY, AMBLE, PERAMBULATOR

ambush [14] Originally, *ambush* meant literally 'put in a bush' – or more precisely 'hide in a wood, from where one can make a surprise attack'. The hypothetical Vulgar Latin verb **imboscāre* was formed from the prefix *in-* and the noun **boscus* 'bush, thicket' (a word of Germanic origin, related to English *bush*). In Old French this became *embuschier*, and when English acquired it its prefix gradually became transformed into *am-*.

In the 16th century, various related forms were borrowed into English – Spanish produced *ambuscado*, Italian was responsible for *imboscata*, and French *embuscade* was anglicized was *ambuscade* – but none now survives other than as an archaism.

BUSH

amen [OE] *Amen* was originally a Hebrew noun, *āmēn* 'truth' (based on the verb *āman* 'strengthen, confirm'), which was used adverbially as an expression of confirmation or agreement. Biblical texts translated from Hebrew simply took it over unaltered (the Greek Septuagint has it, for example), and although at first Old English versions of the gospels substituted an indigenous term, 'truly', by the 11th century *amen* had entered English too.

amend see MEND

amethyst [13] The amethyst gets its name from a supposition in the ancient world that it was capable of preventing drunkenness. The Greek word for 'intoxicate' was *methúskein*, which was based ultimately on the noun *methú* 'wine' (source of English *methyl*, and related to English *mead*). The addition of the negative prefix *a-* 'not' produced the adjective *améthustos*, used in the phrase *líthos améthustos* 'anti-intoxicant stone'. This was borrowed as a noun into Latin (*amethystus*), and ultimately into Old French as *ametiste*. English took it over and in the 16th century re-introduced the *-th-* spelling of the Latin word.

MEAD, METHYL

amiable [14] *Amiable* and *amicable* are the two English descendants of that most familiar of Latin verbs, *amo, amas, amat* ... 'love'. It had two rather similar adjectives derived from it: *amābilis* 'lovable' and, via *amīcus* 'friend', *amīcābilis* 'friendly' (source of English *amicable* [15]). *Amicabilis* became in French *amiable*, and this was borrowed into English as *amiable*, but its meaning was subsequently influenced by that of French *aimable* 'likeable, lovable', which came from Latin *amābilis*.

AMICABLE

ammonia [18] *Ammonia* gets its name ultimately from Amon, or Amen, the Egyptian god of life and reproduction. Near the temple of Amon in Libya were found deposits of ammonium chloride, which was hence named *sal ammoniac* – 'salt of Amon'. The gas nitrogen hydride is derived from sal ammoniac, and in 1782 the Swedish chemist Torbern Bergman coined the term *ammonia* for it.

ammonite [18] Like *ammonia*, the *ammonite* gets its name from a supposed connection with Amon, or

Amen, the Egyptian god of life and reproduction. In art he is represented as having ram's horns, and the resemblance of ammonites to such horns led to their being named in the Middle Ages *cornu Ammōnis* 'horn of Amon'. In the 18th century the modern Latin term *ammonītēs* (anglicized as *ammonite*) was coined for them. Earlier, ammonites had been called *snake stones* in English, a term which survived dialectally well into the 19th century.

ammunition [17] *Ammunition* is one of many words which resulted from a mistaken analysis of 'article' plus 'noun' (compare ADDER). In this case, French *la munition* 'the munitions, the supplies' was misapprehended as *l'ammunition*, and borrowed thus into English. At first it was used for military supplies in general, and it does not seem to have been until the beginning of the 18th century that its meaning became restricted to 'bullets, shells, etc'.

The word *munition* itself was borrowed into English from French in the 16th century. It originally meant 'fortification', and came from the Latin noun *mūnītiō*; this was a derivative of the verb *munīre*, 'defend, fortify', which in turn was based on the noun *moenia* 'walls, ramparts' (related to *mūrus* 'wall', the source of English *mural*). Also from *munīre*, via medieval Latin *mūnīmentum*, comes *muniment* [15], a legal term for 'title deed'; the semantic connection is that a title deed is a means by which someone can 'defend' his or her legal right to property.

MUNIMENT, MUNITION, MURAL

amoeba [19] Amoebas got their name (around 1840) from their inherent shapelessness. With their infinitely mobile exterior and their fluid interior, their shape is constantly changing, and so they were christened with the Greek word *amoibē*, which means literally 'change'.

amok [17] *Amok* is Malayan in origin, where it is an adjective, *amoq*, meaning 'fighting frenziedly'. Its first brief brush with English actually came in the early 16th century, via Portuguese, which had adopted it as a noun, *amouco*, signifying a 'homicidally crazed Malay'. This sense persisted until the late 18th century, but by then the phrase *run amok*, with all its modern connotations, was well established, and has since taken over the field entirely. The spelling *amuck* has always been fairly common, reflecting the word's pronunciation.

among among [OE] *Gemong* was an Old English word for 'crowd' – *ge-* was a collective prefix, signifying 'together', and *-mong* is related to *mingle* – and so the phrase *on gemonge* meant 'in a crowd', hence 'in the midst, surrounded'. By the 12th century, the *ge-* element had dropped out, giving *onmong* and eventually *among*. A parallel *bimong* existed in the 13th century.

MINGLE

amount see MOUNTAIN

ampere [19] This international term for a unit of electrical current derives from the name of André-Marie Ampère (1775–1836), the French physicist and mathematician. It was officially adopted by the Congrès Électrique in Paris in 1881. Ampère himself is best remembered for first making the distinction between electrical current and voltage, and for explaining magnetism in terms of electrical currents. The term *ammeter* 'current-measuring device' [19] was based on *ampere*.

ampersand [19] This word for the printed character & is a conflation of the phrase *and per se and*, literally 'and by it self and'. This has been variously explained as either 'the single character "&" signifies *and*', or 'and on its own [that is, as the final character in a list of the letters of the alphabet given in old grammar books and primers], &'. The character & itself is a conventionalized printed version of an abbreviation used in manuscripts for Latin *et* 'and'.

AND

amphibious [17] The Greek prefix *amphi*meant 'both, on both sides' (hence an *amphitheatre* [14]: Greek and Roman theatres were semicircular, so two joined together, completely surrounding the arena, formed an amphitheatre). Combination with *bios* 'life' (as in *biology*) produced the Greek adjective *amphibios*, literally 'leading a double life'. From the beginning of its career as an English word it was used in a very wide, general sense of 'combining two completely distinct or opposite conditions or qualities' (Joseph Addison, for example, used it as an 18th-century equivalent of modern *unisex*), but that meaning has now almost entirely given way to the word's zoological application. At first, *amphibious* meant broadly 'living on both land and water', and so was applied by some scientists to, for example, seals; but around 1819 the zoologist William Macleay proposed the more precise application, since generally accepted, to frogs, newts, and other members of the class Amphibia whose larvae have gills but whose adults breathe with lungs.

BIOLOGY

amuse [15] *Amuse* is probably a French creation, formed with the prefix *a-* from the verb *muser* (from which English gets *muse* 'ponder' [14]). The current meaning 'divert, entertain' did not begin to emerge until the 17th century, and even so the commonest application of the verb in the 17th and 18th centuries was 'deceive, cheat'. This seems to have developed from an earlier 'bewilder, puzzle', pointing back to an original sense 'make someone stare open-mouthed'. This links with the probable source of *muser*, namely *muse* 'animal's mouth', from medieval Latin *mūsum* (which gave English *muzzle* [15]). There is no connection with the inspirational muse, responsible for *music* and *museums*.

MUSE, MUZZLE

anachronism [17] The Greek prefix *ana*meant 'up', and hence, in terms of time, 'back'; Greek *khrónos* meant 'time' (as in English *chronicle*): hence Greek *anakhronismós* 'reference to a wrong time'. From the point of view of its derivation it should strictly be applied to the representation of something as happening earlier than it really did (as if Christ were painted wearing a wristwatch), but in practice, ever since the Greek term's adoption into English, it has also been used for things surviving beyond their due time.

CHRONICLE

anacolouthon see ACOLYTE

anaconda [18] The term *anaconda* has a confused history. It appears to come from Sinhalese *henakandayā*, literally 'lightning-stem', which referred to a type of slender green snake. This was anglicized as *anaconda* by the British naturalist John Ray, who in a *List of Indian serpents* 1693 described it as a snake which 'crushed the limbs of buffaloes and yoke beasts'. And the 1797 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes it as a 'very large and terrible snake [from Ceylon] which often devours the unfortunate traveller alive'. However, in the early 19th century the French zoologist François Marie Daudin for no known reason transferred the name to a large South American snake of the boa family, and that application has since stuck.

analysis [16] The underlying etymological notion contained in *analysis* is of 'undoing' or 'loosening', so that the component parts are separated and revealed. The word comes ultimately from Greek *análusis*, a derivative of the compound verb *analúein* 'undo', which was formed from the prefix *ana-* 'up, back' and the verb *lúein* 'loosen, free' (related to English *less*, *loose*, *lose*, and *loss*). It

entered English via medieval Latin, and in the 17th century was anglicized to *analyse*: 'The Analyse I gave of the contents of this Verse', Daniel Rogers, *Naaman the Syrian* 1642. This did not last long, but it may have provided the impetus for the introduction of the verb *analyse*, which first appeared around 1600; its later development was supported by French *analyser*.

DIALYSIS, LESS, LOOSE, LOSE, LOSS

anathema [16] Originally in Greek *anáthēma* was a 'votive offering' (it was a derivative of the compound verb *anatithénai* 'set up, dedicate', formed from the prefix *ana-* 'up' and the verb *tithénai* 'place', source of English *theme* and related to English *do*). But from being broadly 'anything offered up for religious purposes', the word gradually developed negative associations of 'something dedicated to evil'; and by the time it reached Latin it meant 'curse' or 'accursed person'.

DO, THEME

anatomy [14] Etymologically, *anatomy* means 'cutting up' (the Greek noun *anatomiā* was compounded from the prefix *ana-* 'up' and the base **tom-*, which figures in several English surgical terms, such as *tonsillectomy* [19], as well as in *atom* and *tome*), and when it first came into English it meant literally 'dissection' as well as 'science of bodily structure'. From the 16th century to the early 19th century it was also used for 'skeleton', and in this sense it was often misanalysed as *an atomy*, as if the initial *an*were the indefinite article: 'My bones ... will be taken up smooth, and white, and bare as an atomy', Tobias Smollett, *Don Quixote* 1755.

ATOM, TOME

ancestor [13] Ultimately, *ancestor* is the same word as *antecedent* [14]: both come from the Latin compound verb *antecēdere* 'precede', formed from the prefix *ante-* 'before' and the verb *cēdere* 'go' (source of English *cede* and a host of related words, such as *proceed* and *access*). Derived from this was the agent noun *antecessor* 'one who precedes', which was borrowed into Old French at two distinct times: first as *ancessour*, and later as *ancestre*, which subsequently developed to *ancêtre*. Middle English had examples of all three of these forms. The modern spelling, *ancestor*, developed in the 16th century.

ACCESS, ANTECEDENT, CEDE, PRECEDE, PROCEED

anchor [OE] English borrowed this word from Latin in the 9th century, but its ultimate source is Greek *ágkūra* (which goes back to an Indo-European base **angg-* 'bent', also the source of *angle* and *ankle*). Originally it was spelled *ancor*, reflecting Latin *ancora*; the inauthentic *h* began to creep in in the 16th century, in imitation of the learned-looking but misguided Latin spelling *anchora*.

ANGLE, ANKLE

anchovy [16] English acquired *anchovy* from Spanish *anchova* (the word first turns up as an item on Falstaff's bill at the Boar's Head: 'Anchovies and sack after supper ... 2s 6d', *1 Henry IV* 1596), but before that its history is disputed. One school of thought holds that it comes via Italian dialect *ancioa* from Vulgar Latin **apjua*, which in turn was derived from Greek *aphúē* 'small fry'; but another connects it with Basque *anchu*, which may mean literally 'dried fish'.

ancient [14] Like *antique*, *ancient* was originally, in Latin, an adjectivized version of the adverb and preposition 'before': to *ante* 'before' was added the adjective suffix *-ānus*, to produce the adjective **antecānus* 'going before'. In Old French this became *ancien*, and it passed into English via Anglo-

Norman *auncien*. The final *-t* began to appear in the 15th century, by the same phonetic process as produced it in *pageant* and *tyrant*.

The now archaic use of *ancient* as 'standard, flag' and as 'standard-bearer' (as most famously in Shakespeare's 'ancient Pistol') arose from an alteration of *ensign*.

➧ ANTIQUE

and [OE] A word as ancient as the English language itself, which has persisted virtually unchanged since at least 700 AD, *and* has cognates in other Germanic languages (German *und*, Dutch *en*), but no convincing ultimate ancestor for it has been identified

anecdote [17] In Greek, *anékdotos* meant 'unpublished'. It was formed from the negative prefix *an-* and *ékdotos*, which in turn came from the verb *didónai* 'give' (a distant cousin of English *donation* and *date*) plus the prefix *ek-*'out' – hence 'give out, publish'. The use of the plural *anékdota* by the 6th-century Byzantine historian Procopius as the title of his unpublished memoirs of the life of the Emperor Justinian, which revealed juicy details of court life, played a major part in the subsequent use of Latin *anecdota* for 'revelations of secrets', the sense which *anecdote* had when it first came into English. The meaning 'brief amusing story' did not develop until the mid 18th century.

➧ DATE, DONATION

anemone [16] The wild wood anemone is sometimes called the *wind flower*, and this idea may be reflected in its standard name too. For it comes from Greek *anemónē*, which appears to be a derivative of *ánemos* 'wind' (also the source of English *animal* and *animate*). However, it has also been speculated that the Greek word may be an alteration of Hebrew *Na' amān*, which was an epithet applied to Adonis, the beautiful youth beloved of Aphrodite from whose blood, according to Greek legend, the anemone sprang after he was killed while boar hunting. According to this view, *anemónē* arose from a folk-etymological reformulation of the Hebrew word to make it approximate more closely to the Greek for 'wind'.

The application to *sea anemone* began in the late 18th century.

➧ ANIMAL, ANIMATE

angel [12] In a sense, English already had this word in Anglo-Saxon times; texts of around 950 mention *englas* 'angels'. But in that form (which had a hard *g*) it came directly from Latin *angelus*. The word we use today, with its soft *g*, came from Old French *angele* (the 'hard *g*' form survived until the 13th century). The French word was in its turn, of course, acquired from Latin, which adopted it from Greek *ángelos* or *ággelos*. This meant literally 'messenger', and its use in religious contexts arises from its being used as a direct translation of Hebrew *mal'ākh* 'messenger', the term used in the scriptures for God's intermediaries. The Greek word itself may be of Persian origin.

➧ EVANGELIST

anger [12] The original notion contained in this word was of 'distress' or 'affliction'; 'rage' did not begin to enter the picture until the 13th century. English acquired it from Old Norse *angr* 'grief', and it is connected with a group of words which contain connotations of 'constriction': German and Dutch *eng* (and Old English *enge*) mean 'narrow', Greek *ánkhein* meant 'squeeze, strangle' (English gets *angina* from it), and Latin *angustus* (source of English *anguish*) also meant 'narrow'.

All these forms point back to an Indo-European base *_angg_-'narrow'.

ANGINA, ANGUISH

angina see ANGUISH

angle There have been two distinct words *angle* in English. The older is now encountered virtually only in its derivatives, *angler* and *angling*, but until the early 19th century an *angle* was a 'fishing hook' (or, by extension, 'fishing tackle'). It entered the language in the Old English period, and was based on Germanic *_angg_- (source also of German *angel* 'fishing tackle'). An earlier form of the word appears to have been applied by its former inhabitants to a fishhook-shaped area of Schleswig, in the Jutland peninsula; now *Angeln*, they called it *Angul*, and so they themselves came to be referred to as *Angles*. They brought their words with them to England, of course, and so both the country and the language, *English*, now contain a reminiscence of their fishhooks.

Angle in the sense of a 'figure formed by two intersecting lines' entered the language in the 14th century (Chaucer is its first recorded user). It came from Latin *angulus* 'corner', either directly or via French *angle*. The Latin word was originally a diminutive of *_angus_, which is related to other words that contain the notion of 'bending', such as Greek *ágkūra* (ultimate source of English *anchor*) and English *ankle*. They all go back to Indo-European *_angg_-'bent', and it has been speculated that the fishhook *angle*, with its temptingly bent shape, may derive from the same source.

ENGLISH; ANCHOR, ANKLE

anguish [13] English acquired *anguish* from Old French *anguisse*, changing its ending to *-ish* in the 14th century. Its central notion of 'distress' or 'suffering' goes back ultimately (as in the case of the related *anger*) to a set of words meaning 'constriction' (for the sense development, compare the phrase *in dire straits*, where *strait* originally meant 'narrow'). Old French *anguisse* came from Latin *angustia* 'distress', which was derived from the adjective *angustus* 'narrow'. Like Greek *ánkhein* 'squeeze, strangle' (ultimate source of English *angina* [16]) and Latin *angere* 'strangle', this came originally from an Indo-European base *_angg_- 'narrow'.

ANGER, ANGINA

animal [14] Etymologically, an *animal* is a being which breathes (compare DEER). Its immediate source was the Latin adjective *animālis* 'having a soul', a derivative of the noun *anima* 'breath, soul' (which also gave English the verb and adjective *animate* [15]). *Anima* is a member of a set of related words in which the notions of 'breath, wind' and 'spirit, life' are intimately connected: for instance, Greek *ánemos* 'wind' (possible source of English *anemone*), Latin *animus* 'spirit, mind, courage, anger' (source of English *animosity* [15] and *animus* [19]), Sanskrit *ániti* 'breathe', Old English *ōthian* 'breathe', Swedish *anda* 'breath, spirit', and Gothic *usanan* 'breathe out'. The 'breath' sense is presumably primary, the 'spirit, life' sense a metaphorical extension of it.

ANEMONE, ANIMATE, ANIMOSITY, ANIMUS

ankle [14] *Ankle* comes from a probable Old Norse word *_ankula_. It has several relatives in other Germanic languages (German and Dutch *enkel*, for instance, and Swedish and Danish *ankel*) and can be traced back to an Indo-European base *_angg_- 'bent' (ultimate source also of *anchor* and *angle*). Before the Old Norse form spread through the language, English had its own native version of the word: *anclēow*. This survived until the 15th century in mainstream English, and for much longer in local dialects.

ANCHOR, ANGLE

annals see ANNUAL

annex [14] The verb *annex* entered English about a century and a half before the noun. It came from French *annexer*, which was formed from the past participial stem of Latin *annectere* 'tie together' (a verb *annect*, borrowed directly from this, was in learned use in English from the 16th to the 18th centuries). *Annectere* itself was based on the verb *nectere* 'tie', from which English also gets *nexus* and *connect*. The noun was borrowed from French *annexe*, and in the sense 'extra building' retains its *-e*.

CONNECT, NEXUS

annihilate [16] *Annihilate* comes from the past participle of the late Latin verb *annihilāre*, meaning literally 'reduce to nothing' (a formation based on the noun *nihil* 'nothing', source of English *nihilism* and *nil*). There was actually an earlier English verb, *annihil*, based on French *annihiler*, which appeared at the end of the 15th century, but it did not long survive the introduction of *annihilate*.

NIHILISM, NIL

anniversary [13] Like *annual*, *anniversary* is based ultimately on Latin *annus* 'year'. The underlying idea it contains is of 'yearly turning' or 'returning'; the Latin adjective *anniversarius* was based on *annus* and *versus* 'turning' (related to a wide range of English words, from *verse* and *convert* to *vertebra* and *vertigo*). This was used in phrases such as *diēs anniversāria* 'day returning every year', and eventually became a noun in its own right.

ANNUAL, CONVERT, VERSE

announce see PRONOUNCE

annoy [13] *Annoy* comes ultimately from the Latin phrase *in odiō*, literally 'in hatred', hence 'odious' (*odiō* was the ablative sense of *odium*, from which English got *odious* [14] and *odium* [17]). The phrase was turned into a verb in later Latin – *inodiāre* 'make loathsome' – which transferred to Old French as *anuier* or *anoier* (in modern French this has become *ennuyer*, whose noun *ennui* was borrowed into English in the mid 18th century in the sense 'boredom').

ENNUI, NOISOME, ODIOUS

annual [14] *Annual* comes, via Old French *annuel*, from *annuālis*, a late Latin adjective based on *annus* 'year' (perhaps as a blend of two earlier, classical Latin adjectives, *annuus* and *annālis* – ultimate source of English *annals* [16]). *Annus* itself may go back to an earlier, unrecorded **atnos*, probably borrowed from an ancient Indo-European language of the Italian peninsula, such as Oscan or Umbrian. It appears to be related to Gothic *athnam* 'years' and Sanskrit *átati* 'go, wander'.

The medieval Latin noun *annuitās*, formed from the adjective *annuus*, produced French *annuité*, which was borrowed into English as *annuity* in the 15th century.

ANNALS, ANNIVERSARY, ANNUITY

anode [19] The term *anode*, meaning 'positive electrode', appears to have been introduced by the English philosopher William Whewell around 1834. It was based on Greek *ánodos* 'way up', a compound noun formed from *aná*-'up' and *hodós* 'way' (also represented in *exodus* 'way out' and

odometer 'instrument for measuring distance travelled', and possibly related to Latin *cēdere*, source of English *cede* and a host of derived words). It specifically contrasts with *cathode*, which means literally 'way down'.

EXODUS, ODOMETER

anonymous see NAME

anorak [20] This was originally a word in the Inuit language of Greenland: *annoraaq*. It came into English in the 1920s, by way of Danish. At first it was used only to refer to the sort of garments worn by Eskimos, but by the 1930s it was being applied to a waterproof hooded coat made in imitation of these. In Britain, such jackets came to be associated with the sort of socially inept obsessives who stereotypically pursue such hobbies as train-spotting and computer-gaming, and by the early 1980s the term 'anorak' was being contemptuously applied to them.

answer [OE] Etymologically, the word *answer* contains the notion of making a sworn statement rebutting a charge. It comes from a prehistoric West and North Germanic compound **andswarōn*; the first element of this was the prefix **and-* 'against', related to German *ent-*'away, un-' and to Greek *anti-*, source of English *anti-*; and the second element came from the same source as English *swear*. In Old English, the Germanic compound became *andswaru* (noun) and *andswarian* (verb) 'reply', which by the 14th century had been reduced to *answer*.

The synonymous *respond* has a similar semantic history: Latin *respondēre* meant 'make a solemn promise in return', hence 'reply'. And, as another element in the jigsaw, Swedish *ansvar* means 'responsibility' – a sense echoed by English *answerable*.

SWEAR

ant [OE] The word *ant* appears to carry the etymological sense 'creature that cuts off or bites off'. Its Old English form, *æmette*, was derived from a hypothetical Germanic compound **aimaitjōn*, formed from the prefix **ai-* 'off, away' and the root **mait-* 'cut' (modern German has the verb *meissen* 'chisel, carve'): thus, 'the biter'. The Old English word later developed along two distinct strands: in one, it became *emmet*, which survived into the 20th century as a dialectal form; while in the other it progressed through *amete* and *ampte* to modern English *ant*.

If the notion of 'biting' in the naming of the ant is restricted to the Germanic languages (German has *ameise*), the observation that it and its nest smell of urine has been brought into play far more widely. The Indo-European root **meigh-*, from which ultimately we get *micturate* 'urinate' [18], was also the source of several words for 'ant', including Greek *múrmēx* (origin of English *myrmecology* 'study of ants', and also perhaps of *myrmidon* [14] 'faithful follower', from the *Myrmidons*, a legendary Greek people who loyally followed their king Achilles in the Trojan war, and who were said originally to have been created from ants), Latin *formīca* (hence English *formic acid* [18], produced by ants, and *formaldehyde* [19]), and Danish *myre*. It also produced Middle English *mire* 'ant', the underlying meaning of which was subsequently reinforced by the addition of *piss* to give *pismire*, which again survived dialectally into the 20th century.

antagonist [16] Greek *agón* (source of English *agony*) meant 'contest, conflict'. Hence the concept of 'struggling against (*anti-*) someone' was conveyed in Greek by the verb *antagōnízesthai*. The derived noun *antagonistés* entered English via French or late Latin.

AGONY

antarctic see ARCTIC

antecedent see ANCESTOR

antelope [15] *Antelope* comes from medieval Greek *antholops*. In the Middle Ages it was applied to an outlandish but figmentary beast, in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'haunting the banks of the Euphrates, very savage, hard to catch, having long saw-like horns with which they cut in pieces and broke all "engines" and even cut down trees'. The term was subsequently used for a heraldic animal, but it was not until the early 17th century that it was applied, by the naturalist Edward Topsell, to the swift-running deerlike animal for which it is now used.

anthem [OE] *Anthem* is ultimately an alteration of *antiphon* 'scriptural verse said or sung as a response' (which was independently reborrowed into English from ecclesiastical Latin in the 15th century). It comes from Greek *antíphōnos* 'responsive', a compound formed from *anti-*'against' and *phōné* 'sound' (source of English *phonetic*, *telephone*, etc). By the time it had become established in Old English, *antiphon* had already developed to *antefn*, and gradually the /v/ sound of the *f* became assimilated to the following *n*, producing *antemne* and eventually *antem*. The spelling with *th* begins to appear in the 15th century, perhaps influenced by Old French *anthaine*; it gradually altered the pronunciation.

The meaning 'antiphon' died out in the 18th century, having been succeeded by 'piece of choral church music' and more generally 'song of praise'. The specific application to a 'national song' began in the 19th century.

▶ ANTIPHON, PHONETIC, TELEPHONE

anther [18] Greek *ánthos* originally meant 'part of a plant which grows above ground' (this was the basis of the Homeric 'metaphor' translated as 'flower of youth', which originally referred to the first growth of beard on young men's faces). Later it narrowed somewhat to 'flower'. The adjective derived from it was *anthērós*, which was borrowed into Latin as *anthēra*, a noun meaning 'medicine made from flowers'. In practice, herbalists often made such medicines from the reproductive part of the flower, and so *anther* came to be applied to the pollen-bearing part of the stamen.

More remote semantically, but also derived from Greek *ánthos*, is *anthology* [17]. The second element represents Greek *logi.* 'collecting', a derivative of the verb *legein* 'gather' (which is related to *legend* and *logic*). The notion of a collection of flowers, *anthologiā*, was applied metaphorically to a selection of choice epigrams or brief poems: borrowed into English, via French *anthologie* or medieval Latin *anthologia*, it was originally restricted to collections of Greek verse, but by the mid 19th century its application had broadened out considerably. The parallel Latin formation, *florilegium*, also literally 'collection of flowers', has occasionally been used in English for 'anthology'.

▶ ANTHOLOGY

anthrax [14] In Greek, *anthrax* means 'coal' (hence English *anthracite* [19]). The notion of a burning coal led to its being applied metaphorically to a very severe boil or carbuncle, and that is how it was first used in English. It was not until the late 19th century that the word came into general use, when it was applied to the bacterial disease of animals that had been described by Louis Pasteur (which produces large ulcers on the body).

▶ ANTHRACITE

antic see ANTIQUE

antidote see DATE

antimacassar [19] An antimacassar was a cloth spread over chairbacks in the 19th and early 20th centuries to protect them from greasy hair. It took its name from Macassar oil, a proprietary brand of hair oil made by Rowland and Son, allegedly from ingredients obtained from Makassar, a region of the island of Sulawesi (formerly Celebes) in Indonesia.

antimony [15] *Antimony*, from medieval Latin *antimōnium*, was used by alchemists of the Middle

Ages for 'stibnite', the mineral from which antimony is obtained, and for 'stibium', or 'black antimony', a heated and powdered version of the mineral used for eye make-up. The element antimony itself was first described in the late 18th century, when it was called *regulus of antimony*; the British chemist Humphry Davy appears to have been the first to apply the simple term *antimony* to it, in 1812.

The ultimate origins of the word *antimony* are obscure, but attempts have been made to link it with Latin *stibium* (source of *Somebody*, the chemical symbol for antimony). It has been speculated that Latin *antimōnium* may have been a modification of Arabic *ithmid*, which was perhaps borrowed from Greek *stimmi* or *stíbi* (source of Latin *stibium*). This in turn has been conjecturally traced back to an Egyptian word *stm*, which was used for a sort of powder applied to the eyelids as make-up.

antiphon see ANTHEM

antipodes [16] Greek *antípodes* meant literally 'people who have their feet opposite' – that is, people who live on the other side of the world, and therefore have the soles of their feet 'facing' those of people on this side of the world. It was formed from the prefix *anti-* 'against, opposite' and *poús* 'foot' (related to English *foot* and *pedal*). English *antipodes*, borrowed via either French *antipodes* or late Latin *antipodes*, originally meant 'people on the other side of the world' too, but by the mid 16th century it had come to be used simply for the 'opposite side of the globe'.

FOOT, PEDAL

antique [16] Originally, in Latin, *antique* was an adjectivized version of the adverb and preposition 'before': to *ante* 'before' was added the adjective suffix *-īcus*, to produce the adjective *antīquus* (somewhat later an exactly parallel formation, using the suffix *-ānus* rather than *-īcus*, produced the adjective which became English *ancient*). English acquired the word either via French *antique* or directly from Latin. To begin with, and until relatively recently, it meant simply 'ancient', or specifically 'of the ancient world'; it was only towards the end of the 18th century that the modern sense 'made long ago and therefore collectable' began to become established.

In Italian, *antico* (from Latin *antīquus*) was often applied to grotesque carvings found in ancient remains. It was borrowed into English in the 16th century as an adjective, *antic*, meaning 'bizarre', but also as a noun, usually used in the plural, in the sense 'absurd behaviour'.

ANCIENT, ANTIC

antirrhinum [16] *Antirrhinum* means literally 'similar to a nose'. The Greek compound *antirrhinon* was formed from the prefix *anti-*'against, simulating' and *rhīn-*, the stem of *rhīs* 'nose' (also found in English *rhinoceros*). The English word was borrowed from the latinized form, *antirrhinum*. The name comes, of course, from the snapdragon flower's supposed resemblance to an animal's nose or muzzle (another early name for the plant was *calf's snout*).

RHINOCEROS

antler [14] English acquired *antler* via Anglo-Norman *auntelere* from Old French *antoillier* (modern French has *andouiller*). Its previous history is not altogether clear; it has been speculated that it comes originally from Latin **anteoculāris*, which would have meant literally 'positioned before (*ante*) the eye (*oculus*)', but this derivation is rather dubious.

anvil [OE] Etymologically, an anvil is 'something on which you hit something else'. The Old English

word was *anfīlte*, which came from a prehistoric West Germanic compound formed from **ana* 'on' and a verbal component meaning 'hit' (which was also the source of English *felt*, Latin *pellere* 'hit', and Swedish dialect *filta* 'hit'). It is possible that the word may originally have been a loan-translation based on the Latin for 'anvil', *incūs*; for this too was a compound, based on *in* 'in' and the stem of the verb *cūdere* 'hit' (related to English *hew*).

➧ APPEAL

any [OE] *Any* is descended from a prehistoric Germanic compound meaning literally 'one-y' (a formation duplicated in *ūnique*, whose Latin source *ūnicus* was compounded of *unus* 'one' and the adjective suffix *-icus*). Germanic **ainigaz* was formed from **ain-* (source of English *one*) and the stem **-ig-*, from which the English adjective suffix *-y* is ultimately derived. In Old English this had become *ǣnig*, which diversified in Middle English to *any* and *eny*; modern English *any* preserves the spelling of the former and the pronunciation of the latter.

➧ ONE

aorta see ARTERY

apart [14] English acquired *apart* from Old French *apart*, where it was based on the Latin phrase *ā parte* 'at *or* to the side' (Latin *pars*, *part-* is the source of English *part*). By the time it came into English it already contained the notion of separation.

➧ PART

apartheid [20] *Apartheid* is a direct borrowing from Afrikaans *apartheid*, literally 'separateness', which is a compound based on Dutch *apart* and the suffix *-heid* (related to English *-hood*). The first record of its use in Afrikaans is in 1929, but it does not appear in English-language contexts until 1947.

ape [OE] *Ape* (in Old English *apa*) has cognates in several Germanic languages (German *affe*, Dutch *aap*, Swedish *apa*), and comes from a prehistoric West and North Germanic **apan* (perhaps originally borrowed from Celtic). Until the early 16th century, when English acquired the word *monkey*, it was the only term available for any of the non-human primates, but from around 1700 it began to be restricted in use to the large primates of the family Pongidae.

aphorism see HORIZON

aplomb [18] Originally, *aplomb* meant literally 'quality of being perpendicular'. It was borrowed from French, where it was a lexicalization of the phrase *à plomb* 'according to the plumb line' (*plomb* came from Latin *plumbum* 'lead', also the ultimate source of English *plumb*, *plumber*, *plumbago*, and *plummet*). The notion of 'uprightness' gave rise in the 19th century to the metaphorical sense 'composure'.

➧ PLUMB, PLUMBER, PLUMMET

apocalypse [13] A 'catastrophic event, such as the end of the world' is a relatively recent, 20th-century development in the meaning of *apocalypse*. Originally it was an alternative name for the book of the Bible known as the 'Revelation of St. John the divine', which describes a vision of the future granted to St John on the island of Patmos. And in fact, the underlying etymological meaning of *apocalypse* is literally 'revelation'. It comes, via Old French and ecclesiastical Latin, from Greek *apokálupsis*, a derivative of the verb *apokalúptein* 'uncover, reveal', which was formed from the prefix *apo-* 'away, off' and the verb *kalúptein* 'cover' (related to English *conceal*).

more general sense 'make an earnest request'.

Peal [14], as in 'peal of bells', is an abbreviated form of *appeal*, and *repeal* [14] comes from the Old French derivative *rapeler*.

ANVIL, FELT, PEAL, PULSE, REPEAL

appear [13] *Appear* comes via Old French *apareir* from Latin *appārērē*, a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* and *pārērē* 'show, become visible' (related to Greek *peparein* 'display'). *Appārērē* was also the ultimate source of *apparent* [14], via its present participial stem *appārent-*, and of *apparition* [15], via its noun derivative *appāritiō*.

APPARENT, APPARITION

appease see PEACE

appendix see PENTHOUSE

appetite [14] In its origins, *appetite* referred to a very generalized desire or inclination; the wish for food is a secondary development. The Latin noun was *appetītus*, a derivative of the compound verb *appetere* 'strive after, desire eagerly', which was based on *petere* 'go to, seek out' (source also of English *compete*, *impetus*, *petition*, and *repeat*, and related to *feather*).

COMPETE, IMPETUS, PETITION, REPEAT

applaud [15] English probably acquired this word directly from Latin *applaudere*, which meant literally 'clap at'. It was a compound formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and the verb *plaudere* 'clap', source also of *plaudit* [17] and of *explode*, whose original sense seems to have been 'drive from the stage by clapping' (or, presumably, by any other signals of disapproval favoured by Roman audiences).

EXPLODE, PLAUDIT

apple [OE] Words related to *apple* are found all over Europe; not just in Germanic languages (German *apfel*, Dutch *appel*, Swedish *äpple*), but also in Balto-Slavonic (Lithuanian *óbuolas*, Polish *jabtko*), and Celtic (Irish *ubhall*, Welsh *afal*) languages. The Old English version was *æppel*, which developed to modern English *apple*. Apparently from earliest times the word was applied not just to the fruit we now know as the apple, but to any fruit in general. For example, John de Trevisa, in his translation of *De proprietatibus rerum* 1398 wrote 'All manner apples that is, "fruit" that are enclosed in a hard skin, rind, or shell, are called Nuces nuts'. The term *earth-apple* has been applied to several vegetables, including the cucumber and the potato (compare French *pomme de terre*), and *pineapple* (which originally meant 'pine cone', with particular reference to the edible pine nuts) was applied to the tropical fruit in the 17th century, because of its supposed resemblance to a pine cone.

apple-pie bed see PLY

apply see PLY

appoint [14] *Appoint* came from the Old French verb *apointier* 'arrange', which was based on the phrase *a point*, literally 'to a point'. Hints of the original meaning can still be found in some of the verb's early uses in English, in the sense 'settle a matter decisively', but its main modern meanings, 'fix by prior arrangement' and 'select for a post', had become established by the mid 15th century.

POINT

appraise [15] Originally, *appraise* meant simply 'fix the price of'. It came from the Old French verb *aprisier* 'value', which is ultimately a parallel formation with *appreciate*; it is not clear whether it came directly from late Latin *appretiāre*, or whether it was a newly formed compound in Old French, based on *pris* 'price'. Its earliest spellings in English were thus *apprize* and *apprise*, and these continued in use down to the 19th century, with the more metaphorical meaning 'estimate the worth of' gradually coming to the fore. From the 16th century onwards, however, it seems that association with the word *praise* (which is quite closely related etymologically) has been at work, and by the 19th century the form *appraise* was firmly established.

Apprise 'inform', with which *appraise* is often confused (and which appears superficially to be far closer to the source *pris* or *pretium* 'price'), in fact has no etymological connection with it. It comes from *appris*, the past participle of French *apprendre* 'teach' (closely related to English *apprehend*).

APPRECIATE, PRICE

appreciate [17] Like *appraise*, *appreciate* originally comes from the notion of setting a price on something. It comes from late Latin *appretiāre*, a compound verb formed from *ad-*'to' and *pretium* 'price'. The neutral sense of 'estimating worth' was already accompanied by the more positive 'esteem highly' when the word began to be used in English, and by the late 18th century the meaning 'rise in value' (apparently an American development) was well in place.

APPRAISE, PRICE

apprehend [14] The underlying notion in *apprehend* is of 'seizing' or 'grasping'; it comes ultimately from the Latin verb *prehendere* 'seize' (source also of *comprehend*, *predatory*, and *prehensile*). Latin *apprehendere* 'lay hold of', formed with the prefix *ad-*, developed the metaphorical meaning 'seize with the mind' – that is, 'learn'; and that was the earliest meaning *apprehend* had in English when it was borrowed either directly from Latin or via French *appréhender*: John de Trevisa, for instance, in his translation of *De proprietatibus rerum* 1398 writes 'he holds in mind ... without forgetting, all that he apprehends'. More familiar modern senses, such as 'arrest' and 'understand', followed in the 16th century.

A contracted form of the Latin verb, *apprendere*, became Old French *aprendre*, modern French *apprendre* 'learn'. This provided the basis for the derivative *aprentis* 'someone learning', from which English gets *apprentice* [14]; and its past participle *appris*, in the causative sense 'taught', was the source of English *apprise* [17].

The chief modern meaning of the derived noun *apprehension*, 'fear', arose via the notion of 'grasping something with the mind', then 'forming an idea of what will happen in the future', and finally 'anticipation of something unpleasant'.

APPRENTICE, COMPREHEND, IMPREGNABLE, PREDATORY, PREHENSILE

approach [14] *Approach* is etymologically connected with *propinquity* 'nearness'; they both go back ultimately to Latin *prope* 'near'. *Propinquity* [14] comes from a derived Latin adjective *propinquus* 'neighbouring', while *approach* is based on the comparative form *propius* 'nearer'. From this was formed the late Latin verb *appropiāre* 'go nearer to', which came to English via Old French *aprochier*. Latin *prope*, incidentally, may be connected in some way with the preposition *prō* (a

relative of English *for*), and a hypothetical variant of it, **proqe*, may be the source, via its superlative *proximus*, of English *proximity* and *approximate*.

PROPINQUITY, PROXIMITY

appropriate see PROPER

approve [14] The Latin source of *approve*, *approbāre*, was a derivative of *probāre*, source of English *prove*. *Probāre* originally meant 'test something to find if it is good' (it was based on Latin *probus* 'good') and this became extended to 'show something to be good or valid'. It was this sense that was taken up by *approbāre* and carried further to 'assent to as good'. When English acquired the word, via Old French *aprover*, it still carried the notion of 'demonstrating', but this was gradually taken over exclusively by *prove*, and the senses 'sanction' and 'commend', present since the beginning, established their primacy.

PROBITY, PROVE

approximate see PROXIMITY

apricot [16] The word *apricot* reached English by a peculiarly circuitous route from Latin. The original term used by the Romans for the apricot, a fruit which came ultimately from China, was *prūnum Arminiacum* or *mālum Arminiacum* 'Armenian plum *or* apple' (Armenia was an early source of choice apricots). But a new term gradually replaced these: *malum praecocum* 'early-ripening apple' (*praecocus* was a variant of *praecox*, from which English gets *precocious*). *Praecocum* was borrowed by a succession of languages, making its way via Byzantine Greek *beríkokkon* and Arabic *al birqūq* 'the apricot' to Spanish *albaricoque* and Portuguese *albricoque*. This was the source of the English word, but its earliest form, *abrecock*, shows that it had already acquired the initial *ab*- of French *abricot*, and the final *-t* followed almost immediately. Spellings with *p* instead of *b* are also found in the 16th century.

PRECOCIOUS

April [14] *Aprīlis* was the name given by the Romans to the fourth month of the year. It is thought that the word may be based on *Apru*, an Etruscan borrowing of Greek *Aphrō*, a shortened version of *Aphroditē*, the name of the Greek goddess of love. In that case *Aprīlis* would have signified for the Romans 'the month of Venus'. English acquired the word direct from Latin, but earlier, in the 13th century, it had borrowed the French version, *avril*; this survived, as *averil*, until the 15th century in England, and for longer in Scotland. The term *April fool* goes back at least to the late 17th century.

APHRODITE

apron [14] As in the case of *adder*, *umpire*, and many others, *apron* arose from a mistaken analysis of the combination 'indefinite article + noun'. The original Middle English word was *napron*, but as early as the 15th century *a napron* had turned into *an apron*. *Napron* itself had been borrowed from Old French *naperon*, a derivative of *nape* 'cloth' (source of English *napery* and *napkin*); and *nape* came from Latin *mappa* 'napkin, towel' (source of English *map*).

MAP, MAT, NAPKIN

apse [19] *Apse* 'vaulted recess in a church' is an anglicization of Latin *apsis*. This was a borrowing of Greek *apsís* or *hapsís*, which meant literally 'a fastening together' (it was derived from the verb

háptein 'join'). The notion that underlies its application to a vaulted space seems to be the joining together of arcs to form a circle; an early Greek use was as a 'felloe', part of the rim of a wheel, and this later came to mean, by extension, the wheel itself. Further metaphoricization led to the sense 'orbit', and, more semicircularly, 'arch' or 'vault'.

The Latin/Greek form *apsis* itself was borrowed into English at the beginning of the 17th century, and remains in use as a technical term in astronomy, 'extreme point of an orbit'.

apt [14] *Apt* comes from Latin *aptus* 'fit, suited', the past participle of the verb *apere* 'fasten'. Other English words from this source are *adapt*, *adapt*, *adept*, *inept*, and (with the Latin prefix *com-*) *couple* and *copulation*. Related words are found in Indo-European languages of the Indian subcontinent: for instance, Sanskrit *āpta* 'fit'.

➧ ADAPT, ADEPT, ATTITUDE, COUPLE, INEPT

aquamarine [19] *Aquamarine* means literally 'sea water' – from Latin *aqua marīna*. Its first application in English was to the precious stone, a variety of beryl, so named because of its bluish-green colour. The art critic John Ruskin seems to have been the first to use it with reference to the colour itself, in *Modern Painters* 1846. (The French version of the word, *aiguemarine*, was actually used in English somewhat earlier, in the mid 18th century, but it did not long survive the introduction of the Latin version.)

Latin *aqua* 'water' has of course contributed a number of other words to English, notably *aquatic* [15] (from Latin *aquāticus*), *aqualung* (coined around 1950), *aquarelle* [19] (via Italian *acquerella* 'water colour'), *aquatint* [18] (literally 'dyed water'), *aqueduct* [16] (from Latin *aquaeductus*), and *aqueous* [17] (a medieval Latin formation); it is related to Old English *ēa* 'water' and *īg* 'island', and is of course the source of French *eau*, Italian *acqua*, and Spanish *agua*.

aquarium [19] *Aquarium* is a modern adaptation of the neuter form of the Latin adjective *aquārius* 'watery' (a noun *aquārium* existed in Roman times, but it meant 'place where cattle drink'). Its model was *vivarium*, a 16th-century word for a 'place for keeping live animals'. This was the term first pressed into service to describe such a place used for displaying fish and other aquatic life: in 1853 the magazine *Athenaeum* reported that 'the new Fish house at the London Zoo has received the somewhat curious title of the "Marine Vivarium"'; and in the following year the guidebook to the Zoological Gardens called it the 'Aquatic Vivarium'. Within a year or two of this, however, the term *aquarium* had been coined and apparently established.

aquiline see EAGLE

arbitrary [15] *Arbitrary* comes ultimately from Latin *arbiter* 'judge', via the derived adjective *arbitrārius*. It originally meant 'decided by one's own discretion or judgment', and has since broadened, and 'worsened', in meaning to 'capricious'. The Latin noun has of course contributed a large number of other words to English, including *arbiter* [15] itself, *arbitrate* [16] (via the Latin verb *arbitrārī*), and *arbitrament* [14]. *Arbitrage* in the sense 'buying and selling shares to make a profit' is a 19th-century borrowing from French, where it means literally 'arbitration'.

➧ ARBITRATE

arbour [14] Despite its formal resemblance to, and semantic connections with, Latin *arbor* 'tree', *arbour* is not etymologically related to it. In fact, its nearest English relative is *herb*. When it first came into English it was *erber*, which meant 'lawn' or 'herb/flower garden'. This was borrowed,

via Anglo-Norman, from Old French *erbier*, a derivative of *erbe* 'herb'. This in turn goes back to Latin *herba* 'grass, herb' (in the 16th century a spelling with initial *h* was common in England). Gradually, it seems that the sense 'grassy plot' evolved to 'separate, secluded nook in a garden'; at first, the characteristic feature of such shady retreats was their patch of grass, but their seclusion was achieved by surrounding trees or bushes, and eventually the criterion for an arbour shifted to 'being shaded by trees'. Training on a trellis soon followed, and the modern *arbour* as 'bower' was born. The shift from grass and herbaceous plants to trees no doubt prompted the alteration in spelling from *erber* to *arbour*, after Latin *arbor*; this happened in the 15th and 16th centuries.

HERB

arc see ARCH

arcane [16] *Arcane* comes from the Latin adjective *arcānus* 'hidden, secret'. This was formed from the verb *arcēre* 'close up', which in turn came from *arca* 'chest, box' (source of English *ark*). The neuter form of the adjective, *arcānum*, was used to form a noun, usually used in the plural, *arcāna* 'mysterious secrets'.

ARK

arch [14] English acquired *arch* via Old French *arche* and a hypothetical Vulgar Latin **arca* from Latin *arcus* 'curve, arch, bow' (from which English also got *arc* [14]). When it first came into the language it was still used in the general sense of 'curve, arc' as well as 'curved structure' (Chaucer in his *Treatise on the astrolabe* 1391 wrote of 'the arch of the day ... from the sun arising till it go to rest'), but this had died out by the mid 19th century. Vulgar Latin **arca* also produced Italian *arcata*, which entered English via French as *arcade* in the 18th century.

Arch meaning 'saucy' is an adjectival use of the prefix *arch-* (as in *archetype*).

ARC

archaic see ARCHIVES

archer [13] Like *arch*, *archer* comes from Latin *arcus* 'curve, bow'. Its hypothetical Vulgar Latin derivative **arcārius* 'bowman' passed via Old French *archier* and Anglo-Norman *archer* into English. The ultimate source of *arcus* was the Indo-European base **arkw-*, from which English *arrow* eventually developed.

ARC, ARCH, ARROW

archetype [17] *Archetype* comes, via Latin *archetypum*, from Greek *arkhétupon*, a nominal use of the adjective *arkhétupos*, literally 'first-moulded', from *túpos* 'mould, model, type'.

The Greek prefix *arkhe-* was based on the noun *arkhos* 'chief, ruler', a derivative of the verb *arkhein* 'begin, rule' (see ARCHIVES). It first entered our language (via Latin *archi-*) in the Old English period, as *arce-* (*archbishop* was an early compound formed with it); and it was reborrowed in the Middle English period from Old French *arche-*. Its use has gradually extended from 'highest in status' and 'first of its kind' to 'the ultimate – and usually the worst – of its kind', as in *archcraitor*. Its negative connotations lie behind its eventual development, in the 17th century, into an independent adjective, first as 'cunning, crafty', later as 'saucy, mischievous'.

The same Greek root has provided English with the suffixes *-arch* and *-archy* (as in *monarch, oligarchy*); but here the original meaning of 'ruling' has been preserved much more stably.

English *azalea* [18] (so named from its favouring dry soil); and the Latin verb *ardere* 'burn' was derived from it, from which English gets *ardour* [14], *ardent* [14], and *arson*.

ARDOUR, AREA, ARSON, ASH, AZALEA

arise [OE] *Arise* is a compound verb with cognate forms in many other Germanic languages (Gothic, for instance, had *urreisan*). The prefix *a-* originally meant 'away, out', and hence was used as an intensive; *rise* comes from an unidentified Germanic source which some etymologists have connected with Latin *rīvus* 'stream' (source of English *rivulet*), on the basis of the notion of a stream 'rising' from a particular source. The compound *arise* was in fact far commoner than the simple form *rise* in the Old English period, and it was only in early Middle English that *rise* began to take its place. This happened first in northern dialects, and may have been precipitated by Old Norse *rísa*. Today, it is only in the sense 'come into existence' that *arise* is commoner.

RAISE, REAR, RISE, RIVULET

aristocracy [16] Greek *áristos* meant 'best'; hence *aristocracy* signifies, etymologically, 'rule by the best' (the suffix *-cracy* derives ultimately from Greek *krátos* 'strength, power', a relative of English *hard*). The term *aristokratíā* was used by Aristotle and Plato in their political writings, denoting 'government of a state by those best fitted for the task', and English writers perpetuated the usage when the word was borrowed from French *aristocratie*: Thomas Hobbes, for instance, wrote 'Aristocracy is that, wherein the highest magistrate is chosen out of those that have had the best education', *Art of Rhetoric* 1679. But from the first the term was also used in English for 'rule by a privileged class', and by the mid 17th century this had begun to pass into 'the privileged class' itself, 'the nobility'. The derived *aristocrat* appeared at the end of the 18th century; it was a direct borrowing of French *aristocrate*, a coinage inspired by the French Revolution.

HARD

arithmetic see ALGORITHM

ark [OE] The notion underlying *ark* seems to be that of 'enclosing or defending a space'. Its ultimate Latin source, *arca* 'large box *or* chest', was related to *arx* 'citadel' and to *arcēre* 'close up' (from which English gets *arcane*). *Arca* was borrowed into prehistoric Germanic, and came into English as *ærc*. In addition to meaning 'chest' (a sense which had largely died out by the 18th century), it signified the 'coffer in which the ancient Hebrews kept the tablets of the Ten Commandments' – the Ark of the Covenant – and by extension, the large commodious vessel in which Noah escaped the Flood.

ARCANE, EXERCISE

arm [OE] The two distinct senses of *arm*, 'limb' and 'weapon', both go back ultimately to the same source, the Indo-European base **ar-* 'fit, join' (which also produced *art* and *article*). One derivative of this was Latin *arma* 'weapons, tools', which entered English via Old French *armes* in the 13th century (the singular form was virtually unknown before the 19th century, but the verb *arm*, from Latin *armāre* via Old French *armer*, came into the language in the 13th century). The other strand is represented in several European languages, meaning variously 'joint', 'shoulder', and 'arm': Latin *armus* 'shoulder', for example, and Greek *harmos* 'joint'. The prehistoric Germanic form was **armaz*, from which developed, among others, German, Dutch, Swedish, and English *arm*.

ART, ARTICLE

armour [13] *Armour* comes ultimately from Latin *armātūra* 'armour, equipment', a derivative of the verb *armāre* 'arm' (the direct English borrowing *armature* [15] originally meant 'armour' or 'weapons', but the 'protective' notion of armour led to its application in the 18th century to 'metal covering the poles of a magnet'). In Old French *armātūra* became *armeure*, and subsequently *armure*, the form in which it was borrowed into English (the *-our* ending was artificially grafted on in the 14th century on the model of other Latin-based words such as *colour* and *odour*). *Armoury* is French in origin: Old French *armoier* 'coat of arms' was a derivative of *arme* 'weapon'; this became *armoirie*, which was borrowed into English in the 15th century as *armory*, meaning 'heraldry', but also, owing to their formal similarity, came to be used with the same sense as *armour* – 'protective metal suit' or 'weapons'. This was what *armoury* meant when it came into English in the 14th century (and the sense survived long enough to be used by Wordsworth in a sonnet to 'Liberty' 1802: 'In our halls is hung armoury of invincible knights of old'). The meaning 'place for keeping weapons' developed in the 16th century.

➧ ARMATURE

army [14] Latin *armāta* 'armed', the past participle of the verb *armare*, was used in post-classical times as a noun, meaning 'armed force'. Descendants of *armāta* in the Romance languages include Spanish *armada* and French *armée*, from which English borrowed *army*. In early usage it could (like Spanish *armada*) mean a naval force as well as a land force ('The King commanded that £21,000 should be paid to his army (for so that fleet is called everywhere in English Saxon) which rode at Greenwich', Marchamont Needham's translation of Selden's *Mare clausum* 1652), but this had virtually died out by the end of the 18th century.

➧ ARM, ARMADA

around [14] *Around* was formed in Middle English from the prefix *a-* 'on' and the noun *round* (perhaps influenced by the Old French phrase *a la reonde* 'in the round, roundabout'). It was slow to usurp existing forms such as *about* – it does not occur in Shakespeare or the 1611 translation of the Bible – and it does not seem to have become strongly established before the end of the 17th century. The adverb and preposition *round* may be a shortening of *around*.

➧ ROUND

arouse [16] Shakespeare is the first writer on record to use *arouse*, in *2 Henry VI*, 1593: 'Loud howling wolves arouse the jades that drag the tragic melancholy night'. It was formed, with the intensive prefix *a-*, from *rouse*, a word of unknown origin which was first used in English in the 15th century as a technical term in falconry, meaning 'plump up the feathers'.

➧ ROUSE

arpeggio see HARPSICHORD

arrack [17] *Arrack* is an Asian alcoholic drink distilled from rice or molasses. The word comes ultimately from Arabic *'araq* 'sweat, juice, liquor', which was borrowed in a variety of forms into several Asiatic languages. The immediate source of English *arrack* seems to have been an Indian language.

arrange [14] *Arrange* is a French formation: Old French *arangier* was a compound verb formed from the prefix *a-* and the verb *rangier* 'set in a row' (related to English *range* and *rank*). In English its first, and for a long time its only meaning was 'array in a line of battle'. Shakespeare does not use

it, and it does not occur in the 1611 translation of the Bible. It is not until the 18th century that it becomes at all common, in the current sense 'put in order', and it has been speculated that this is a reborrowing from modern French *arranger*.

RANGE, RANK

arrant [16] *Arrant* is an alteration of *errant*, as in *knight errant*. This originally meant 'roaming, wandering', but its persistent application to nouns with negative connotations, such as *rogue* and *thief*, gradually drove its meaning downwards by association, to 'notorious'.

ERRANT

arras [15] An *arras* is a tapestry hanging, immortalized by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* when he conceals Polonius behind one, there to be killed by Hamlet. The word comes from the Anglo-Norman phrase *draps d'arras*, literally 'cloth of Arras': Arras is a city in the Pas-de-Calais, northern France, famous in the Middle Ages as a centre for the manufacture of woollens and tapestry.

arrear see REAR

arrest [14] The Latin verb *restāre* meant 'stand back, remain behind' or 'stop' (it is the source of English *rest* in the sense 'remainder'). The compound verb *arrestāre*, formed in post-classical times from the prefix *ad-* and *restāre*, had a causative function: 'cause to remain behind or stop', hence 'capture, seize'. These meanings were carried over via Old French *arester* into English.

REST

arrive [13] When speakers of early Middle English 'arrived', what they were literally doing was coming to shore after a voyage. For *arrive* was originally a Vulgar Latin compound verb based on the Latin noun *rīpa* 'shore, river bank' (as in the English technical term *riparian* 'of a river bank'; and *river* comes from the same source). From the phrase *ad rīpam* 'to the shore' came the verb **arripāre* 'come to land', which passed into English via Old French *ariver*. It does not seem to have been until the early 14th century that the more general sense of 'reaching a destination' started to establish itself in English.

RIPARIAN, RIVER

arrogant [14] Etymologically, to be *arrogant* is to make great claims about oneself. It originated in the Latin compound verb *arrogāre* 'claim for oneself', formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *rogāre* 'ask' (as in English *interrogāte*). Already in Latin the present participle *arrogans* was being used adjectivally, for 'overbearing', and this passed via Old French into English.

INTERROGATE, PREROGATIVE

arrow [OE] Appropriately enough, the word *arrow* comes from the same ultimate Indo-European source that produced the Latin word for 'bow' – **arkw-*. The Latin descendant of this was *arcus* (whence English *arc* and *arch*), but in Germanic it became **arkhw-*. From this basic 'bow' word were formed derivatives in various Germanic languages meaning literally 'that which belongs to the bow' – that is, 'arrow' (Gothic, for instance, had *arhwazna*). The Old English version of this was *earh*, but it is recorded only once, and the commonest words for 'arrow' in Old English were *strǣl* (still apparently in use in Sussex in the 19th century, and related to German *strahl* 'ray') and *fiān* (which remained in Scottish English until around 1500). Modern English *arrow* seems to be a 9th-century reborrowing from Old Norse **arw*.

arrowroot [17] Arrowroot, a tropical American plant with starchy tubers, gets its name by folk etymology, the process whereby an unfamiliar foreign word is reformulated along lines more accessible to the speakers of a language. In this case the word in question was *aru-aru*, the term used by the Arawak Indians of South America for the plant (meaning literally 'meal of meals'). English-speakers adapted this to *arrowroot* because the root of the plant was used by the Indians to heal wounds caused by poisoned arrows.

arse [OE] *Arse* is a word of considerable antiquity, and its relatives are found practically from end to end of the geographical range of the Indo-European language family, from Old Irish *err* 'tail' in the west to Armenian *or* 'rump'. Its Indo-European source was **órsos*, which produced the Germanic form **arsaz*: hence German *arsch*, Dutch *aars*, and, via Old English *ærs*, English *arse*. The euphemistic American spelling *ass* appears to be as recent as the 1930s, although there is one isolated (British) record of it from 1860.

The term *wheatear*, for a thrushlike European bird, is an alteration over time of a Middle English epithet 'white arse', after its white rump feathers.

arsenal [16] The word *arsenal* has a complicated history, stretching back through Italian to Arabic. The Arabic original was *dār-as-sinā'ah*, literally 'house of the manufacture'. This seems to have been borrowed into Venetian Italian, somehow losing its initial *d*, as *arzaná*, and been applied specifically to the large naval dockyard in Venice (which in the 15th century was the leading naval power in the Mediterranean). The dockyard is known to this day as the Arzenale, showing the subsequent addition of the *-al* ending. English acquired the word either from Italian or from French *arsenal*, and at first used it only for dockyards ('making the Arsenal at Athens, able to receive 1000 ships', Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural history* 1601); but by the end of the 16th century it was coming into more general use as a 'military storehouse'. The English soccer club Arsenal gets its name from its original home in Woolwich, south London, where there used to be a British government arsenal.

arsenic [14] The term *arsenic* was originally applied to the lemon-yellow mineral arsenic trisulphide, and its history reveals the reason: for its appears to be based ultimately on Persian *zar* 'gold' (related forms include Sanskrit *hari* 'yellowish', Greek *khlōros* 'greenish-yellow', and English *yellow* itself). The derivative *zarnīk* was borrowed into Arabic as *zernīkh*, which, as usual with Arabic words, was perceived by foreign listeners as constituting an indivisible unit with its definite article *al* 'the' – hence *azzernīkh*, literally 'the arsenic trisulphide'. This was borrowed into Greek, where the substance's supposed beneficial effects on virility led, through association with Greek *arrēn* 'male, virile', to the new forms *arrenikón* and *arsenikón*, source of Latin *arsenicum* and, through Old French, of English *arsenic*. The original English application was still to arsenic trisulphide (*orpiment* was its other current name), and it is not until the early 17th century that we find the term used for white arsenic or arsenic trioxide. The element arsenic itself was isolated and so named at the start of the 19th century.

arson [17] Like *ardour* and *ardent*, *arson* comes from the Latin verb *ardēre* 'burn'. Its past participle was *arsus*, from which was formed the noun *arsiō* 'act of burning'. This passed via Old French into Anglo-Norman as *arson*, and in fact was in use in the Anglo-Norman legal language of England from the 13th century onwards (it occurs in the Statute of Westminster 1275). The jurist Sir

Matthew Hale was the first to use the word in a vernacular text, in 1680. Other words in English ultimately related to it include *arid* and probably *ash*, *area*, and *azalea*.

ARDOUR, AREA, ASH, AZALEA

art [13] Like *arm*, *arthritis*, and *article*, *art* goes back to an Indo-European root **ar-*, which meant 'put things together, join'. Putting things together implies some skill: hence Latin *ars* 'skill'. Its stem *art-* produced Old French *art*, the source of the English word. It brought with it the notion of 'skill', which it still retains; the modern association with painting, sculpture, etc did not begin until the mid 17th century. Latin derivatives of *ars* include the verb *artīre* 'instruct in various skills', from which ultimately English gets *artisan* [16]; and *artificium*, a compound formed with a variant of *facere* 'do, make', from which we get *artificial* [14].

ARM, ARTHRITIS, ARTICLE, ARTIFICIAL, ARTISAN, INERT

artery [14] *Artery* is a direct borrowing from Latin *artēria*, which in turn came from Greek *artēria*. This appears to have been based on the root **ar-* 'lift'. A parallel formation is thus *aorta* 'main coronary artery' [16], which comes from Greek *aortē*, a derivative of *aeírein* 'lift' – again ultimately from the root **ar-*. The notion underlying *aortē* seems to be that the heart was thought of by the ancients as in some sense suspended from it, as if from a strap (Greek *aortḗs* 'strap'), so that it was 'held up' or 'raised' by the *aortē* (the aorta emerges from the top of the heart). The Greeks, of course, did not know about the circulation of the blood, and since arteries contain no blood after death it was supposed that their function was conveying air. Hence Hippocrates' application of the term *aorta* to branches of the windpipe, and the use of *artery* for 'windpipe' in English up until as late as the mid 17th century: '[The lungs] expel the air: which through the artery, throat and mouth, makes the voice', Francis Bacon, *Sylva sylvarum* 1626.

AORTA

artesian [19] In the 18th century drillings made in Artois (a former northern French province roughly corresponding to the modern Pas-de-Calais) produced springs of water which rose spontaneously to the surface, without having to be pumped. The name of the province, in its erstwhile form *Arteis*, was bestowed on the phenomenon, and has been so used ever since.

arthritis [16] Greek *árthron* meant 'joint' (it is used in various technical terms in biology, such as *arthropod* 'creature, such as an insect, with jointed limbs'). It came from the Indo-European root **ar-* 'put things together, join, fit', which also produced Latin *artus* 'limb' (source of English *article*) and English *arm*, as well as *art*. The compound *arthritis* is a Greek formation (*-itis* was originally simply an adjectival suffix, so *arthritis* meant 'of the joints' – with 'disease' understood; its application to 'inflammatory diseases' is a relatively modern development); it reached English via Latin.

ARM, ART, ARTICLE

artichoke [16] The word *artichoke* is of Arabic origin; it comes from *al kharshōf* 'the artichoke', which was the Arabic term for a plant of the thistle family with edible flower-parts. This was borrowed into Spanish as *alcarchofa*, and passed from there into Italian as *arcicioffo*. In northern dialects this became *articiocco*, the form in which the word was borrowed into other European languages, including English.

The term was first applied to the Jerusalem artichoke, a plant with edible tuberous roots, early in the 17th century. The epithet *Jerusalem* has no connection with the holy city; it arose by folk

aspic [18] *Aspic* was borrowed from French, where, like the archaic English *asp* which reputedly bit Cleopatra, it also means 'snake' (ultimately from Greek *aspís*). This has led to speculation that *aspic* the jelly was named from *aspic* the snake on the basis that the colours and patterns in which moulds of aspic were made in the 18th and 19th centuries resembled a snake's coloration. There does not appear to be any watertight evidence for this rather far-fetched theory, and perhaps more plausible is some connection with French *aspic* 'lavender, spikenard', formerly used for flavouring aspic, or with Greek *aspís* 'shield' (source of *aspidistra* [19]), on the basis that the earliest aspic moulds were shield-shaped.

aspire see SPIRIT

aspirin [19] The word *aspirin* was coined in German towards the end of the 19th century. It is a condensed version of the term *acetylierte spirsäure* 'acetylated spiraeic acid'. *Spiraeic acid* is a former term for 'salicylic acid', from which aspirin is derived; its name comes from the *spiraea*, a plant of the rose family.

➧ SPIRAEA

ass [OE] *Ass* comes ultimately from Latin *asinus* 'donkey' (whence English *asinine* [16]), and English probably acquired it via a Celtic route, from a prehistoric Old Celtic **as(s)in* (source of Welsh *asyn*). As borrowed directly into the Germanic languages, by contrast, the *n* of Latin *asinus* changed to *l*; from this branch of the word's travels Old English had *esol*, long defunct, and Dutch has *ezel*, which English has appropriated as *easel*. Further back in time the word's antecedents are unclear, but some would trace it to Sumerian *ansu*, which could also be the source of Greek *ónos* (whence English *onager* 'wild ass' [14]) and Armenian *eš*.

➧ EASEL, ONAGER

assassin [17] Etymologically, an assassin is an 'eater or smoker of hashish', the drug cannabis. In the Middle Ages, in the area of the Middle East and modern Iran, there was a sect of fanatical Ismaili Muslims, founded in the late 11th century by Hassan ibn Sabbah. Its members killed the sect's opponents under the influence of cannabis. Hence the *hashshāshīn* (plural of *hashshāsh*, Arabic for 'hashish-eater') came to have a reputation as murderers. In English the Arabic plural form was perceived as singular. The word has retained its connotation of one who kills for political or religious rather than personal motives.

➧ HASHISH

assault [13] To assault somebody was originally to 'jump on' them. The word comes from a Vulgar Latin compound verb **assaltāre*, formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *saltāre* 'jump', a frequentative form (denoting repeated action) of the verb *salīre* 'jump' (which is the source of English *salient*, and by a similar compounding process produced *assail* [13]). In Old French this became *asauter*, and English originally borrowed it as *asaute*, but in the 16th century the *l* was reintroduced.

➧ ASSAIL, SOMERSAULT

assay see ESSAY

assemble see SIMILAR

assent see SENSE

assert [17] *Assert* comes ultimately from Latin *asserere*, which meant literally 'join oneself to

something'. It was a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'to' and *serere* 'join' (source of English *series* and *serial*), and it came to take on various metaphorical connotations: if one 'joined oneself to' a particular thing, one 'declared one's right to' it, and if one 'joined oneself to' a particular point of view, one 'maintained' it, or 'claimed' it. The verb was used in both these senses when English acquired it, from the Latin past participial stem *assert*, but the former had more or less died out by the end of the 18th century.

➧ SERIAL, SERIES

assess [15] The literal meaning of Latin *assidēre*, ultimate source of *assess*, was 'sit beside someone' (it was a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'near' and *sedēre* 'sit', a relative of English *sit*). This developed the secondary meaning 'sit next to a judge and assist him in his deliberations' (which lies behind English *assize*), and in medieval Latin the sense passed from helping the judge to performing his functions, particularly in fixing the amount of a fine or tax to be paid. Hence English *assess*, which came via Old French *assesser* from Latin *assess-*, the past participial stem of *assidēre*. (The Latin adjective *assiduus*, formed from *assidēre* in the sense 'apply oneself to something', gave English *assiduous* [16].)

➧ ASSIDUOUS, ASSIZE, SESSION, SIT, SIZE

asset [16] Originally, to have *assets* was simply to have 'enough' – as in French *assez*. The Anglo-Norman legal phrase *aver asetz* signified 'have enough money to meet one's debts', and eventually *asetz*, later *assets*, passed from the general meaning 'enough' to the particular 'financial resources' (the final *-s* caused it to be regarded as a plural noun, but the analogical singular *asset* does not appear until the 19th century). Anglo-Norman *asetz* itself goes back via Old French *asez* to Vulgar Latin **assatis*, formed from the Latin phrase *ad satis* 'to enough' (*satis* is the source of English *satisfy* and *satiate*, and is related to *sad*).

➧ SAD, SATIATE, SATISFY

asseveration see SEVERE

assiduous see ASSESS

assign see SIGN

assist [15] Etymologically, *assist* means 'stand by'. It comes, via French *assister*, from Latin *assistere*, a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'near' and *sistere* 'stand' (related to Latin *stāre* 'stand', from which English gets *state*, *station*, *status*, *statue*, etc). A remnant of this original meaning survives in the sense 'be present without actually participating', but the main use of the word in English has always been that which came from the metaphorical sense of the Latin verb – 'help'.

➧ STATE, STATION, STATUE, STATUS

assize [13] Like *assess*, *assize* comes ultimately from Latin *assidēre*, which meant literally 'sit beside someone' (it was a compound verb formed from the prefix *ad-* 'near' and *sedēre* 'sit', related to English *sit*). In Old French this became *asseeir* (modern French has *asseoir*), of which the past participle was *assis*. The feminine form of this, *assise*, came to be used as a noun ranging in meaning from the very general 'act of sitting' or 'seat' to the more specific legal senses 'sitting in judgement' and 'session of a court' (English *session* comes ultimately from Latin *sedēre* too). It was the legal usages which passed into English.

SESSION, SIT, SIZE

associate [14] Latin *socius* meant 'companion' (it is related to English *sequel* and *sue*), and has spawned a host of English words, including *social*, *sociable*, *society*, and *socialism*. In Latin, a verb was formed from it, using the prefix *ad*-'to': *associāre* 'unite'. Its past participle, *associātus*, was borrowed into English as an adjective, *associate*; its use as a verb followed in the 15th century, and as a noun in the 16th century.

SEQUEL, SOCIAL, SOCIETY, SUE

assort see SORT

assuage see PERSUADE

assume see PROMPT

assure see INSURE

asthma [14] The original idea contained in *asthma* is that of 'breathing hard'. The Greek noun *asthma* was derived from the verb *ázein* 'breathe hard' (related to *áein* 'blow', from which English gets *air*). In its earliest form in English it was *asma*, reflecting its immediate source in medieval Latin, and though the Greek spelling was restored in the 16th century, the word's pronunciation has for the most part stuck with *asma*.

AIR

astound [17] *Astound*, *astonish*, and *stun* all come ultimately from the same origin: a Vulgar Latin verb **extonāre*, which literally meant something like 'leave someone thunderstruck' (it was formed from the Latin verb *tonāre* 'thunder'). This became Old French *estoner*, which had three offshoots in English: it was borrowed into Middle English in the 13th century as *astone* or *astun*, and immediately lost its initial *a*, producing a form *stun*; then in the 15th century, in Scotland originally, it had the suffix *-ish* grafted on to it, producing *astonish*; and finally in the 17th century its past participle, *astoned* or, as it was also spelled, *astound*, formed the basis of a new verb.

ASTONISH, STUN

astronomy [13] *Astronomy* comes via Old French and Latin from Greek *astronomiā*, a derivative of the verb *astronomein*, literally 'watch the stars'. Greek *ástron* and *astér* 'star' (whence English *astral* [17] and *asterisk* [17]) came ultimately from the Indo-European base **ster-*, which also produced Latin *stella* 'star', German *stern* 'star', and English *star*. The second element of the compound, which came from the verb *némein*, meant originally 'arrange, distribute'.

At first, no distinction was made between astronomy and astrology. Indeed, in Latin *astrologia* was the standard term for the study of the stars until Seneca introduced the Greek term *astronomia*. When the two terms first coexisted in English (*astrology* entered the language about a century later than *astronomy*) they were used interchangeably, and in fact when a distinction first began to be recognized between the two it was the opposite of that now accepted: *astrology* meant simply 'observation', whereas *astronomy* signified 'divination'. The current assignment of sense was not fully established until the 17th century.

ASTERISK, ASTRAL, STAR

asylum [15] Greek *sulon* meant 'right of seizure'. With the addition of the negative prefix *a-* 'not' this was turned into the adjective *ásūlos* 'inviolable', which in turn was nominalized as *āsūlon*

'refuge'. When it first entered English, via Latin *asȳlum*, it was used specifically for 'place of sanctuary for hunted criminals and others' (a meaning reflected in modern English 'political asylum'), and it was not until the mid 18th century that it came to be applied to mental hospitals.

at [OE] The preposition *at* was originally found throughout the Germanic languages: Old English had *æt*, Old High German *az*, Gothic and Old Norse *at*. It survives in the Scandinavian languages (Swedish *att*, for instance) as well as English, but has been lost from German and Dutch. Cognates in other Indo-European languages, including Latin *ad* 'to, at', suggest an ultimate common source.

athlete [18] The etymological idea underlying *athlete* is 'competing for a prize'. Greek *āthlon* meant 'award, prize', whence the verb *athlein* 'compete for a prize'. Derived from this was the noun *athlētés* 'competitor'. The context in which the word was most commonly used in Greek was that of the public games, where competitors took part in races, boxing matches, etc. Hence the gradual narrowing down of the meaning of *athlete* to 'one who takes part in sports involving physical exercise', and even further to 'participant in track and field events'.

atlas [16] In Greek mythology, *Atlas* was a Titan who as a punishment for rebelling against the gods was forced to carry the heavens on his shoulders. Hence when the term was first used in English it was applied to a 'supporter': 'I dare commend him to all that know him, as the Atlas of Poetry', Thomas Nashe on Robert Greene's *Menaphon* 1589. In the 16th century it was common to include a picture of Atlas with his onerous burden as a frontispiece in books of maps, and from this arose the habit of referring to such books as *atlases* (the application is sometimes said to have arisen specifically from such a book produced in the late 16th century by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator (1512–94), published in England in 1636 under the title *Atlas*).

Atlas also gave his name to the Atlantic ocean. In ancient myth, the heavens were said to be supported on a high mountain in northwestern Africa, represented as, and now named after, the Titan Atlas. In its Greek adjectival form *Atlantikós* (later Latin *Atlanticus*) it was applied to the seas immediately to the west of Africa, and gradually to the rest of the ocean as it came within the boundaries of the known world.

▶ ATLANTIC

atmosphere [17] Etymologically, *atmosphere* means 'ball of vapour'. It was coined as modern Latin *atmosphaera* from Greek *atmós* 'vapour' (related to *áein* 'blow', ultimate source of English *air*) and *sphaira* 'sphere'. Its original application was not, as we would now understand it, to the envelope of air encompassing the Earth, but to a mass of gas exhaled from and thus surrounding a planet; indeed, in the first record of the word's use in English, in 1638, it was applied to the Moon, which of course is now known to have no atmosphere. The denotation of the word moved forward with the development of meteorological knowledge.

▶ AIR, SPHERE

atoll [17] *Atoll* was borrowed from Malayalam *atolu* 'reef', the name used by Maldive Islanders for their islands, many of which are coral atolls

atom [16] Etymologically, *atom* means 'not cut, indivisible'. Greek *átomos* 'that which cannot be divided up any further' was formed from the negative prefix *a-* 'not' and the base **tom-* 'cut' (source also of English *anatomy* and *tome*), and was applied in the Middle Ages not just to the smallest imaginable particle of matter, but also to the smallest imaginable division of time; an hour contained 22,560 atoms. Its use by classical writers on physics and philosophy, such as

Democritus and Epicurus, was sustained by medieval philosophers, and the word was ready and waiting for 19th-century chemists when they came to describe and name the smallest unit of an element, composed of a nucleus surrounded by electrons.

ANATOMY, TOME

atone [16] As its spelling suggests, but its pronunciation disguises, *atone* comes from the phrase *at one* 'united, in harmony', lexicalized as *atone* in early modern English. It may have been modelled on Latin *adūnāre* 'unite', which was similarly compounded from *ad* 'to, at' and *ūnum* 'one'.

AT, ONE

atrocious [17] Traced back to its ultimate source, *atrocious* meant something not too dissimilar to 'having a black eye'. Latin *āter* was 'black, dark' (it occurs also in English *atrabilious* 'melancholic' [17] – Greek *mélas* meant 'black'), and the stem *-*oc-*, *-*ox* meant 'looking, appearing' (Latin *oculus* 'eye' and *ferox* 'fierce' – based on *ferus* 'wild', and source of English *ferocious* – were formed from it, and it goes back to an earlier Indo-European base which also produced Greek *ōps* 'eye' and English *eye*). Combined, they formed *atrox*, literally 'of a dark or threatening appearance', hence 'gloomy, cruel'. English borrowed it (in the stem form *atrōci-*) originally in the sense 'wantonly cruel'.

EYE, FEROCIOUS, INOCULATE, OCULAR

attach [14] When English first acquired it, *attach* meant 'seize' or 'arrest'. It is Germanic in origin, but reached us via Old French *atachier*. This was an alteration of earlier Old French *estachier* 'fasten (with a stake)', which was based on a hypothetical Germanic **stakōn*. The metaphorical meaning 'arrest' appears to have arisen in Anglo-Norman, the route by which the word reached English from Old French; the original, literal sense 'fasten, join' did not arrive in English until as late as the 18th century, as a reborrowing from modern French *attacher*.

A similar borrowing of Germanic **stakōn* into Italian produced the ancestor of English *attack*.

ATTACK, STAKE

attack [16] *Attack* reached English via French *attaquer* from Italian *attaccare* 'attach, join', which, like Old French *atachier* (source of English *attach*) was based on a hypothetical Germanic **stakōn* (from which English gets *stake*). Phrases such as *attaccare battaglia* 'join battle' led to *attaccare* being used on its own to mean 'attack'. *Attach* and *attack* are thus 'doublets' – that is, words with the same ultimate derivation but different meanings.

ATTACH, STAKE

attain [14] Unlike *contain*, *maintain*, *obtain*, and the rest of a very long list of English words ending in *-tain*, *attain* does not come from Latin *tenēre* 'hold'. Its source is Latin *tangere* 'touch' (as in English *tangible* and *tangent*). The addition of the prefix *ad-* 'to' produced *attingere* 'reach', which passed via Vulgar Latin **attangere* and Old French *ataindre* into English.

TANGENT, TANGIBLE

attempt [14] *Attempting* is etymologically related to *tempting*. The Latin verb *attemptāre* was formed with the prefix *ad-* from *temptāre*, which meant 'try' as well as 'tempt' (the semantic connection is preserved in modern English *try*, with the contrasting senses 'attempt' and 'put to the test'). The Latin form passed into Old French as *atenter* (hence modern French *attenter*), but was later

AVIARY, AVIATION, INAUGURATE

August [OE] The month of August was named by the Romans after their emperor Augustus (63 BC–14 AD). His name was Caius Julius Caesar Octavian, but the Senate granted him the honorary title *Augustus* in 27 BC. This connoted 'imperial majesty', and was a specific use of the adjective *augustus* 'magnificent, majestic' (source of English *august* [17]); it may derive ultimately from the verb *augēre* 'increase' (from which English gets *auction* and *augment*).

AUCTION, AUGMENT

aunt [13] *Aunt* appears to come ultimately from **amma*, a hypothetical non-Indo-European word for 'mother' (parallel to Indo-European **mammā*, and like it reproducing syllables perceived to be uttered by babies), which at some point was borrowed into Latin. It first appears in the derived form *amita* 'paternal aunt', which passed into English via Old French *ante* (of which modern French *tante* is an alternation) and Anglo-Norman *aunte*.

aura see AIR

aurochs see OX

auspice see AUGUR

authentic [14] Etymologically, something that is authentic is something that has the authority of its original creator. Greek *authentikós* was a derivative of the noun *authéntēs* 'doer, master', which was formed from *autós* 'self' and the base *-hentēs* 'worker, doer' (related to Sanskrit *sanoti* 'he gains'). The adjective's original meaning in English was 'authoritative'; the modern sense 'genuine' did not develop fully until the late 18th century. (Greek *authéntēs*, incidentally, was pronounced /afthendis/, and was borrowed into Turkish as *efendī*, source of English *effendi* [17].)

EFFENDI

author [14] Latin *auctor* originally meant 'creator, originator'; it came from *auct-*, the past participial stem of *augēre*, which as well as 'increase' (as in English *augment*) meant 'originate'. But it also developed the specific sense 'creator of a text, writer', and brought both these meanings with it into English via Old French *autor*. Forms with *-th-* began to appear in the mid 16th century (from French), and originally the *-th-* was just a spelling variant of *-t-*, but eventually it affected the pronunciation.

While the 'writing' sense has largely taken over *author, authority* [13] (ultimately from Latin *auctōritās*) and its derivatives *authoritative* and *authorize* have developed along the lines of the creator's power to command or make decisions.

AUCTION, AUGMENT

autograph [17] Greek *auto-* was a prefixal use of the adjective *autós*, meaning 'same, self'. Many of the commonest *auto-* words in English, including *autograph* itself and also *autocrat* [19], *automatic* [18] (a derivative of *automaton* [17], which was formed from a hypothetical base **men-* 'think' related to *mental* and *mind*), *autonomy* [17], and *autopsy* [17] (originally meaning 'eye-witness', and derived from Greek *optós* 'seen', source of English *optic*), are original Greek formations. But the 19th and particularly the 20th century have seen a mass of new coinages, notably in scientific and technical terminology, including such familiar words as *autism*, *autobiography*, *autoerotic*, *autofocus*, *autogiro*, *autoimmune*, *automotive*, *autosuggestion*, and of course *automobile* (originally a French formation of the 1870s). *Automobile* has itself, of course, given rise to a completely new use

17th century it became known as the *alligator pear*, a name which survived into the 20th century.

avoid [14] *Avoid* at first meant literally 'make void, empty'. It was formed in Old French from the adjective *vuide* 'empty' (source of English *void* [13], and derived from a hypothetical Vulgar Latin **vocitus*, which is related ultimately to *vacant*). With the addition of the prefix *es-* 'out', a verb *evuider* was formed, which passed into English via Anglo-Norman *avoider*. The original sense 'empty' barely survived into the 17th century, but meanwhile it had progressed through 'withdrawing, so as to leave someone alone or leave a place empty' to 'deliberately staying away from someone or something'.

▶ VACANT, VOID

awake [OE] *Awake* was formed by adding the intensive prefix *ā-* to the verb *wake* (in Old English *wacan* or *wacian*, related to *watch*, and also ultimately to *vegetable*, *vigil*, and *vigour*). The adjective *awake* arose in the 13th century; it was originally a variant form of the past participle of the verb.

▶ VIGIL, WAKE, WATCH

aware see WARE

away [OE] *Away* was formed in the late Old English period by conflating the phrase *on weg*, literally 'on way', that is, 'on one's way, departing'. This soon became reduced to *aweg*, hence *away*.

▶ WAY

awe [13] Old English had the word *ege*, meaning 'awe', but modern English *awe* is a Scandinavian borrowing; the related Old Norse *agi* steadily infiltrated the language from the northeast southwards during the Middle Ages. *Agi* came, like *ege*, from a hypothetical Germanic form **agon*, which in turn goes back to an Indo-European base **agh-* (whence also Greek *ákhos* 'pain'). The guttural *g* sound of the 13th-century English word (technically a voiced velar spirant) was changed to *w* during the Middle English period. This was a general change, but it is not always reflected in spelling – as in *owe* and *ought*, for instance, which were originally the same word.

awkward [14] When *awkward* was coined, in Scotland and northern England, it meant 'turned in the wrong direction'. Middle English had an adjective *awk*, which meant 'the wrong way round, backhanded', and hence 'perverse', and with the addition of the suffix *-ward* this became *awkward*. *Awk* itself was adopted from Old Norse *afugr*, which is related to German *ab* 'away' and English *off*. *Awkward* followed a similar semantic path to *awk*, via 'perverse, ill-adapted' to 'clumsy'.

▶ OFF

awl [OE] The Old English form, *æl*, came from a hypothetical Germanic base **āl-*, which had a probable relative in Sanskrit *ārā*. The compound *bradawl* was formed in the 19th century using the term *brad* 'thin flat nail', which came originally from Old Norse *broddr* 'spike'. Awls, tools for making holes to take nails, are part of the shoemaker's traditional set of implements: hence the apparently quite recent, early 20th-century rhyming slang *cobbler's awls* (*cobblers* for short) for 'balls'.

axe [OE] Relatives of the word *axe* are widespread throughout the Indo-European languages, from German *axt* and Dutch *aaks* to Latin *ascia* and Greek *axínē*. These point back to a hypothetical Indo-European **agwesī* or **akusī*, which denoted some sort of cutting or hewing tool. The Old English form was *æx*, and there is actually no historical justification for the modern British spelling *axe*, which first appeared in the late 14th century; as late as 1885 the *Oxford English*

Dictionary made *ax* its main form, and it remains so in the USA.

axis [14] *Axis* is at the centre of a complex web of 'turning' words. Besides its immediate source, Latin *axis*, there were Greek *áxōn*, Sanskrit *ákshas*, and a hypothetical Germanic **akhsō* which produced Old English *eax* 'axle' as well as modern German *achse* 'axle, shaft' and Dutch *as*; and there could well be a connection with Latin *agere* (source of English *act*, *agent*, etc) in the sense 'drive'. Also related is an unrecorded Latin form **acslā*, which produced *āla* 'wing' (source of English *aileron* and *aisle*); its diminutive was *axilla* 'armpit', from which English gets the adjective *axillary* [17] and the botanical term *axil* [18].

▶ AILERON, AISLE, AXIL

axle [17] The word *axle* emerges surprisingly late considering the antiquity of axles, but related terms had existed in the language for perhaps a thousand years. Old English had *eax*, which came from a hypothetical Germanic **akhsō*, related to Latin *axis*. This survived in the compound *ax-tree* until the 17th century (later in Scotland); *tree* in this context meant 'beam'. But from the early 14th century the native *ax-tree* began to be ousted by Old Norse *öxultré* (or as it became in English *axle-tree*); the element *öxull* came from a prehistoric Germanic **akhsulaz*, a derivative of **akhsō*. *Axle* first appeared on its own in the last decade of the 16th century (meaning 'axis', a sense it has since lost), and became firmly established in the early 17th century.

aye see EVER, I

azalea see ARID

azimuth see ZENITH

azure [14] *Azure* is of Persian origin. It comes ultimately from Persian *lāzhuward*, source also of the *lazuli* in *lapis lazuli*, a blue semiprecious stone (and *azure* originally meant 'lapis lazuli' in English). The Arabs borrowed the Persian term as (with the definite article *al*) *allazward*, which passed into Old Spanish as *azur* or *azul*. Old French borrowed *azur* and handed it on to English.

▶ LAPIS LAZULI