

Middle English Word List: West Midlands Dialect

The following handout is a supplement to the Middle English Word List for the London Dialect. This list contains some of the more unusual vocabulary and dialect traits for the West Midlands, that area to the northwestern side of England where the author of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* wrote. Since there is no standardized spelling in the fourteenth century, be alert for words that look like one thing but mean another. Note that voiced consonants (particularly **b**, **d**, and **g**) tend to become unvoiced at the ends of words in the West Midlands Dialect, and thus transform into **p**, **t**, and **k** respectively. Thus, <lomp> for "lamb," and <justyfyet> for "justified" and <nothyнк> for "nothing."

Also beware of the Pearl Poet's tendency to switch **qu** with **wh** at the beginning of words, and vice-versa. So the word <quen> is actually the modern word "when," and so on.

Also watch for *metathesis* (inverted letters) such as spelling the word "Bird" as "Brid" or "whale" as "hwale." A final warning: quoting sources written in Middle English will annoy your computer's spell-check. Allow extra time for proofreading.

-ande: as a suffix, this indicates the present participle when attached to the end of a verb. Thus, "walkande" is equivalent to Mn. English "walking."

anon: at once, immediately

aventure: chance

burg; berg: city; town; cf. modern "Pittsburg" in America and "Hamburg" in Germany.

burn: man; warrior

but, but if: unless

can, kan, conne, konne: to be able, to know, to know how; to learn, to understand.

con: did

certe, certes, sertes: certainly

chorl, churle: a low-born or uncouth fellow; a man (cf. modern "churlish")

clepe(n): call, name, mention

clerk, clerke: a cleric; a priest; a scholar; a literate man

comlok, comlych, comelok: comely; attractive;

daunger: lordship, power, control; ungraciousness, disdain

degree: rank, status, social condition

del, deel: bit, part

deme, deeme: judge, decide; suppose (Mn. E. "deem")

dint, dynt: an injury, a crushing blow, a strike in combat (cf. modern "dent")

dom judgment; decision. cf. Mn. English "doom."

drede: doubt "*it is no drede*" (there is no doubt).

eek, eke: also

er, ere: before

erd, eard, erde: earth, ground, dirt (distantly related to both Mn. English "earth" and "yard")

eyen, eien, yen: eyes (see also "ye" for the singular)

falle: fall; befall, happen

fare: fare, go; act, behave

fayne: glad; as an adverb, gladly, willingly, eagerly

freke: a man; a warrior

folde: earth, hill (especially in sense of a green or fertile area)

for: because (of); for; in order that

fre, free: noble, gracious, generous; free

fro: from (as in "to and fro")

gentilesse: refined character, high breeding, nobility, courtesy

giserne: a battle-ax

go, goon: to walk, to go

gome(n): a game (not to be confused with gome/guma, below)

gome/guma: a man; a warrior (cf. Old English "guma")

gyse: guise; manner, way, fashion, custom

han: have (contracted form of Old and Middle English "haven")

hap: chance, luck; good fortune; occurrence (as in Mn. English "happenstance")

hatan: called, named; ordered

hathel: man; warrior

hende: clever, noble, courteous (Mn. English "handy")

hente(n): to seize, grasp

highte: is called, is named; was called, was named

hoh: third person singular feminine pronoun, Mn. English "she"

i-, y-: as prefix indicates the past participle

ic, iche, i: first person pronoun "I"

ilke: same; the same type

intil: unto; as far as

kinde: nature, race, stock, species, sort; natural disposition

koude: knew; knew how to; could

lat: let
lede, lude: man; warrior
leef, lief, leve: dear, beloved; pleasant, agreeable
lewed: ignorant, unlearned; coarse, rude; wicked
like(n), lyke(n): to like, enjoy (often in impers. constructions; e.g., *me liketh*: it pleases me).
list, lest: to please (often occurs in impers. constructions; e.g., "*me list*," it pleases me)
lite, lyte: little
lust: pleasure; desire
lusty: energetic, happy
maistry: domination, mastery
micel, michel, mickel: much, many
mo: more
moot, moote: may; must; ought to [idiomatic phrases] *so moot I, also moot I, ever moot I*: as I hope also *so moote I thee*: as I hope to prosper
most, moste: must; most
mowe: may (pres. plural of *mowen*)
namely: especially
nas: was not (contraction of *ne was*.)
nat: not
ne: not, nor
nerre: were not (contraction of *ne were*)
nimian: to take, past tense third person is "he *nam*."; past participle is **nomen**.
niste: knew not (contraction of *ne wiste*)
noilde: would not (contraction of *ne wolde*)
not, noot: knows not (contraction of *ne woot*)
nis, nys, nis, nice, nyce: ignorant, foolish, weak; wanton; precise, scrupulous
nys, nis: is not (contraction of *ne is*)
nyste: knew not, did not know (contraction of *ne wiste*)
paraventure: perhaps
povre: poor (like French *pauvre*)
quit, quite: (infinitive) to reciprocate, repay; (past part.) repaid
quod: said
rede, reede: advice, counsel; to advise, to counsel. (Cf. Old English *raed*)
renk: man; warrior
sale: hall; feasting place
segg, segge: man; warrior
sen, syn: since
seker / siker: true, certain, noble (distantly related to Mn. English "secure" and "sacred.")
sentence: opinion, sentiments; moral meaning, significance
siker: certain, sure, true
sikerly: certainly, surely, truly
sit: sits (contraction of *sitteth*)
sith, sithen: since (not to be confused with Darth Vader's domain)
solas: comfort, solace; amusement, entertainment; pleasure
solempne: formal; solemn, serious; ceremonious; festive; merry
sore, soore: bitterly, sorely
sooth, sothe: truth (Mn. English "Soothsayer")
soothfastnesse: truth; truthfulness
stint, stente, stynthe: cease, stop; restrain
sterte: jump, leap, spring, move suddenly (like Mn. English "start," and "startle.")
swir, swire, swyr, swyre: neck
swythe: very, so, suddenly (intensifying adverb)
sythes: since, after
thee, theen: to prosper (infinitive)
ther, there: there; where
thilke: the same (contraction of "*the ilke*")
tho: then
trowe(n): to believe
tulk: a man, a warrior
umbe, umbre-: a prefix meaning "around." cf. Old English *ymbesittendra* in *Beowulf*.
unnethe: scarcely, hardly; with difficulty
wedes: clothes, garments, apparel, (cf. modern "weeds" as slang term for fine clothes in the 1930s).
wende(n): to go, pass, walk (infinitive).
wende: thought, supposed (past tense Old English *wenan*, cf. Mn. English "ween")
whilom: once, once upon a time; formerly
wight wyghe a man; a creature
wiste: knew
wyse: wise; way, manner
y- / i-: as a verb prefix, it indicates the past participle.
yaf: gave
ye, ey, yghe: eye
yep: new; keen; fresh; brave, ready (primarily Northumbrian)
yif: if; give
ywis: certainly, surely