

Common Archaic Early Modern Vocabulary

anon: *adverb* soon; at once

avouch: *verb* affirm or assert

belike: *adverb* probably; perhaps

betwixt (shortened form: **'twixt**): *preposition* and *adverb* between

forsooth: *adverb* truthfully; indeed

lief: *adverb* as happily; as gladly

marry: *interjection* a mild oath (derived from “by the Virgin Marry”); used for emphasis and especially to express amused or surprised agreement

physic: 1) *noun* medicine; 2) *verb* treat with medicine

prithee: *interjection* used to express a wish or request (shortened from “pray thee”)

sirrah: *noun* used as a term of address for a man or boy, especially one younger or of lower status than the speaker

verily: *adverb* truly; certainly

vouchsafe: *verb* give or grant (something) to (someone) in a gracious or condescending manner; reveal or disclose (information)

withal: *adverb* with it all; as well; in addition; besides

wont: 1) *adjective* accustomed; 2) *noun* custom; habit; practice; 3) *verb* to accustom (a person), as to a thing

Common Early Modern Words that Have Changed in Meaning

bark: 1) *noun* a sailing vessel; 2) can be used in the modern senses of the word as well (e.g., the bark of a tree or to bark like a dog)

Go, get aboard; / Look to thy bark. I'll not be long before / I call upon thee.

The Winter's Tale (III.iii.7-9)

clown: 1) *noun* a rustic or peasant; one who displays ignorance or backwards ways (as a peasant or rustic); one without refinement or culture; 2) *noun* a court fool or jester; 3) *verb* to behave ignorantly or uncouthly; 4) the modern usage (e.g., a circus clown) dates to the 18th century

My clown, who wants but something to be a reasonable man, grew so in love with the wenches' song, that he would not stir his pettitoes till he had both tune and words; which so drew the rest of the herd to me that all their other senses stuck in ears.

The Winter's Tale (IV.iv.607-612)

corn: 1) *noun* generic word for grain or seed from grain; 2) corn in the modern sense (as the specific name for American maize) is first attested in 1608, but did not gain widespread use in Britain until much later

Come, let us go: / Our corn's to reap, for yet our tithe's to sow.

Measure for Measure (IV.i.74-75)

cousin (shortened form: **coz**): *noun* kinsman or kinswoman; relative (and not just a literal cousin in the modern sense)

My ever-gentle cousin, welcome hither.

Macbeth (IV.iii.462)

dam: 1) *noun* a female parent (along with permutations like grandam); 2) can be used in the modern senses of the word as well

Why, then she is the devil's dam; a joyful issue.

Titus Andronicus (IV.ii.66)

meat: *noun* food in general (and not just animal flesh)

A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age.

Much Ado about Nothing (II.ii.234-236)

meet: 1) *adjective* suitable or proper; 2) when used as a noun or verb the word possesses its modern meaning

If you think it meet, compound with him by the year, and let him abide here with you.

Measure for Measure (IV.iii.23-25)

soft: 1) *adverb*, (*but used as a command*) not so fast; wait a moment; be quiet; hush; 2) can be used in the modern senses of the word as well

But soft, methinks I do digress too much / Citing my worthless praise.

Titus Andronicus V.iii.116-117

straight: 1) *adverb* at once (this sense is still preserved in the idiom *straight away*); 2) can be used in the modern senses of the word as well

I'll call upon you straight. Abide within.

Macbeth III.i.142

weeds: 1) *noun* garments; 2) can be used in the modern sense of the word as well

Night and silence. -- Who is here? / Weeds of Athens he doth wear.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (II.ii.76-77)