

An Etymological Dog Kennel, or Dog Eat Dog: Icelandic *setja upp við dogg*, Engl. *to lie doggo*, Engl. *dog*, and Engl. *it's raining cats and dogs*

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Abstract: There is a rare slangy British English phrase *to lie doggo* “to lie hid”. The earliest known example is dated in the *OED* to 1882. *Doggo* looks like *dog* + *o* (with *-o*, as in *weirdo*, *typo*, and so forth), but a formation consisting of an animal name followed by the suffix *-o* would have no analogs. Some light on the origin of *lie doggo* may fall from the Modern Icelandic idiom *sitja upp við dogg* ‘to sit or half-lie, supporting oneself with elbows’. *Doggur*, known from texts since the eighteenth century, occurs with several other verbs. Also, *sitja eins og doggur* ‘sit motionless, look distraught’ and *vera eins og doggur* ‘to be motionless’ exist. *Doggur* has nothing to do with dogs, because the Scandinavian word for “dog” is *hund-*. The origin of the English noun *dog* is obscure, but, contrary to the almost universal opinion, the word is not totally isolated. In some German dialects, the diminutive forms *dodel*, *döggel*, and the similar-sounding *tiggel* ~ *teckel* occur. Perhaps *dog* and its continental look-alikes were originally baby words. The same sound complexes as above sometimes mean ‘a cylindrical object’ (such are Icelandic *doggur* and Middle High German *tocke*). Two of the basic meanings of those words were probably ‘round stick; doll’. Although the evidence is late, we can risk suggesting that *lie doggo* also contains the name of some device that was current not too long ago in the European itinerant handymen’s *lingua franca*. The overall image looks nearly the same as in the phrase *dead as a doornail*. In English, folk etymology connected *doggo* with the animal name and misled even professional lexicographers and etymologists. Finally, of some relevance is the English idiom *it rains cats and dogs*, whose forgotten earliest form was *it rains cats and dogs and pitchforks with their points downwards*. Apparently, the original idea was that a downpour of sharp objects fell to the ground.

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1. Etymological Discovery and Luck

Nineteenth-century historical linguists had every right to celebrate its victories. Thanks to Rasmus Rask, Jacob Grimm, and their followers, it became possible to lay bare the ties, previously not only hidden, but even unthinkable. At the crest of the Neogrammarian euphoria, the phrase *the science of etymology* gained ground, and a science it was, though it shared the weaknesses of every field of knowledge: the foundation looked and often proved to be solid, even though the buildings erected on it developed multiple cracks. Etymological algebra, which works well in principle, left many questions unanswered: it went only “so far”. Hundreds of entries in our best etymological dictionaries still contain no answers. As a reaction to this state of affairs, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a romantic school sprang up (Leo Spitzer and other Romance scholars) that emphasized the role of inspiration in etymology. Great discoveries are always inspired, but not every discovery is great, and in reconstructing the past, the line between inspiration and fantasizing is sometimes hard to draw.

Looking back at my long experience, I can single out several non-trivial situations that result in finding a feasible solution.

1) *A word has been given up as hopeless, but a convincing guess exists, hidden in an obscure place.* This is how I came to know the origin of the English word *slang*. It was explained more than a hundred years ago, but the short article on the subject appeared in a local journal, not devoted to language problems. I ran into it twice: first, because my team and I screened all available resources for my etymological database (Liberman, 2010), and at the same time through a footnote in a relatively recent but also “well-hidden” work. A similar rediscovery happened in my dealing with Engl. *dwarf* and *yet*. *Dwarf* is an especially sad case. Friedrich Kluge came close to understanding the distant past of this word, but later gave up his suggestion, and it fell into oblivion. I rediscovered his train of thought, after which connecting the dots (from *dwarf* < **dwezg* to *dizzy*) was not too hard. The etymology of *yet* came to light in a long article by an outstanding German specialist in Slavic (in a section of that article), and English language historians had little chance of noting it.

2) *The etymology is almost obvious, but, to put two and two together, special circumstances are required.* A parade example of this situation is the origin of Engl. *pimp*. German scholars explained the derivation of *Pimpf* ‘a little boy’ long ago (the word is almost transparent), but they did not know Engl. *pimp*. Even if they had been familiar with English books about pimps and prostitutes, they would have discovered only a

curious analog of *Pimpf* and left it at that. Unfortunately, English philologists, in turn, had no notion of *Pimpf* and overlooked the only cognate that would have explained how *pimp* was coined (see the etymology of *slang*, *dwarf*, *yet*, and *pimp* in Liberman, 2008).

Not only lay people but also linguists have trouble overcoming language barriers. I can cite one more example of the same type as *pimp* – *Pimpf*. English etymologists are not certain whether *fog* ‘mist’ and *fog* ‘second crop of grass; aftermath’ are connected. If they were aware of the Russian words *par* ‘steam’ and *par* ‘a field left unsown for one year’, they might have felt more secure. In Slavic, the connection between *par* and *par*² is obvious (from a historical point of view, rather than in today’s linguistic intuition). An etymologist faces a haystack, and the needle may be hidden in Polish, Irish, or French, or, worse still, in some dialect. One cannot explore, let alone know, them all. Buck (1949) and its likes provide some help, but their range is relatively narrow. And this brings me to my last point.

3) *Serendipity*. The English word *galoot* means ‘raw soldier or mariner; uncouth man’. The few guesses about its origin are so unconvincing that they do not deserve reproducing. While hammering away at my bibliography (see above), I examined tens of thousands of pages. Once I ran into Öhman (1940). The title of the article looked rather unpromising, but I had such a high opinion of Öhman’s work that I decided to read that contribution, and on p. 149 saw Italian *galeotto* ~ *galeoto* ~ *galioto* ‘sailor’, corresponding to Old French *galiot* ‘pirate’. The word provided a perfect etymon of *galoot* (apparently, it was part of the sailors’ *lingua franca*). I published this discovery in my weekly blog *The Oxford Etymologist*, and it has gained some recognition. On the same website, I posted my comparison of two slang idioms: Engl. *it gets on my wick* ‘it irritates me’ and German *es geht mir auf den Wecker* (the same meaning). If I, by mere chance, had not known both, both would have remained impenetrable.

There is some difference between the situations described at (1) and (2) – *slang*, *dwarf*, *yet*; *pimp* – and the two last ones: *galoot* and *wick*. No acceptable etymologies of *galoot* and *wick* have ever been proposed, so that they did not have to be rediscovered or excavated. I stumbled into viable solutions by chance. In scholarly work, chance is inseparable from a goal-oriented effort, but it still remains chance; hence my respectful attitude toward serendipity, and it is to serendipity that I’ll devote the rest of this paper, dedicated to Erika Sausverde, with her talent for finding great things “accidentally” and putting them to use.

2. The English Idiom *to lie doggo*

I cannot remember when or where I came across the rare English idiom *to lie doggo* ‘to lie quiet, remain hid; without moving or making a sound; without doing anything that could draw attention.’ That phrase did not show up in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED); it is not entered at *doggo* or at *lie*. The idiom must have been equally foreign to American English in 1890–1910, for it is absent from the extremely detailed *Century Dictionary*.

After the completion of the OED, a supplement was published, and in it, *lie doggo* is represented by three citations, dated to 1893, 1916, and 1924. The voluminous post-World War II supplement added nothing new, except a 1955 example. But the OED online has two pre-1893 citations, the earliest being dated to 1882. It is instructive to look at the evidence of *doggo* in some of our authoritative dictionaries. Although, most likely, no one knows anything definite about the word’s derivation, the attempts to disguise ignorance exist. The third edition of *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (1933) did not include the troublesome word, but that edition was revised many times. In 1942 and 1947 (=1952), the word appeared without any etymology (one finds only [?]). I have not seen the fourth and the fifth edition. Yet the sixth says that *doggo* occurs chiefly in *lie doggo*. The word *chiefly* is confusing, because the alternatives are not given. From the OED online we learn that *play doggo* also exists. In the first (1966) edition of the American *Random House Dictionary*, *doggo* is defined as ‘in concealment, out of sight’, and *lie doggo*, presumably from *dog* + *o* is called informal British slang. In the second (1983/1993) edition, the following example is given: “Lie doggo until the excitement blows over”. I suspect that the sentence was constructed by the editorial staff.

With regard to the origin, all sources that risk an opinion say: “*dog* + (the suffix) *-o*”. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (the 1985 reprint) adds a short comment: “[...] app[arently] f[rom] DOG + O, with ref[erence] to the light sleeping of dogs and the difficulty of telling when their eyes are shut whether they are asleep”. *Webster’s New International (WNI¹)* (1909) could not know anything about *doggo*, but the second edition (1949) contains a novelty. Definition: “Quietly out of sight, esp. in concealment of a trained dog”; this is followed by: “From the pretended sleep of a trained dog”. Where did the information about trained dogs come from? The usually careful Weekley (1921) wonders: “?Like a cunning dog”. The third edition of WNI (1981) admits that the origin is unknown, “probably from *dog* + *o*” and defines the word as slang:

“Quietly out of sight, esp. in concealment – used chiefly in the phrase *to lie doggo*”. In the sixth edition of *The Shorter Oxford*, the formulation is the same as in the *Random House Dictionary*: “Used chiefly in *lie doggo*”.

The suffix or ending *o* indeed exists. It occurs without any obvious function in *cheerio*; for adding a familiar ring to some forms of address (*my boyo*); in *weirdo* ‘an odd “weird” person’, a synonym for *weirdie*; for making words sound “folksy”, as in the name of *Drano*, that is, “draino” (a liquid for opening clogged sinks and toilets), and the like (compare *combo* and *condo*). There can be no doubt that *Godot* in *Waiting for Godot* is *God + o*. It has also been known for a long time that the element *o* enjoys special popularity in Australian English, where it is ubiquitous; the word *kiddo* ‘kid, child’ is a common occurrence in fiction.

Quite recently, the Internet began using *doggo* as a meme for *dog*, and the word, as expected, “went viral”. This was the rebirth of *doggo*. The meme has nothing to do with the old idiom, and the ending (or suffix) *-o* does not prove that this *doggo* originated in Australia. As regards the slang phrase *lie doggo*, a certain detail may be considered. One of the earliest (1893) citations in the OED is from Kipling. Today, Kipling’s relatively short-lived sky-high fame is almost inconceivable: every word he wrote was noticed, remembered (it would pass into proverb!), and repeated throughout the English-speaking world. Perhaps *lie doggo* became more widely known from him. Kipling, who, like Dickens and Thackeray before him, enjoyed parading his knowledge of street language and slang, may have heard it from his military friends or picked it up from any part of the empire. If so, *to lie doggo* was not just slang, but possibly military slang, with the original sense ‘to lie quietly in ambush’. To be sure, the source may also have been hunters’ and sportsmen’s usage.

Quite naturally, English speakers associated *doggo* with the animal name *dog*. However, dogs do not lie in ambush (they are usually urged to attack their prey). Nor does the idea that it is hard to know whether a dog is sleeping or awake sound too appealing. The questions of origins would have remained unassailable if there were not such a thing as serendipity.

3. Modern Icelandic *sitja upp við dogg*

I came across the Icelandic phrase by chance, while reading a newspaper or a short story. It was new to me, but it is common enough, because all good dictionaries feature it. I immediately thought of Engl. *lie doggo*,

which had bothered me for years, for its own sake and in connection with my attempts to understand the origin of the word *dog*. All the glosses and explanations below have been borrowed from ÁBM. *Sitja upp við dogg* (*dogg* is the accusative of *doggur*) means ‘to sit or half-lie, supporting oneself with elbows’. Unlike Engl. *doggo*, which, if one disregards the Internet meme, is a “bound word” and has not been recorded outside the idiom *lie (play) doggo*, Icel. *doggur*, known since the eighteenth century, has an independent existence and designates a vertical cylindrical object (let us not forget the definition). In addition to *sitja upp*, one can say *liggja* ‘to lie’, *hallast* ‘to hold oneself’, and *risa* ‘to rise’, with *dogg* after them. Two close variants include *sitja eins og doggur* ‘sit motionless; look distraught’ and *vera eins og doggur* ‘to be motionless, devoid of emotions’.

The question is whether the idioms in Icelandic and English are related. Whatever the answer may be, one thing is clear: *doggur* has nothing to do with the animal name *dog*, because that animal is called *hundur* in Icelandic and Faroese, and *hund* in all the continental Scandinavian languages.

A look at other Modern Icelandic words beginning with *dogg* reveals the following picture (the parentheses are again from ÁBM): *doggast* (late occurrence) ‘to do something mechanically, without giving thought to the matter, (? from *doggur*, as above) – [so not quite the same as “to pursue the matter doggedly”]; *doggslegur* ‘weak, feeble; sad; dull’ (no time of the earliest occurrence is given; hardly from **dokslegur*: *dok* ‘doubt; hesitation; obstacle, impediment; drowsiness’); *dogginn* (late) ‘persistent’, but also ‘quiet; depressed, down in the mouth’ (a phonetic variant of *dokkin*; *dok* ‘doubt, etc.’ – see it above; in some of its senses the word is geographically limited). The nouns *doggur* ‘dog’ and ‘young shark’ are recent borrowings from English. The conclusion offered in the entry runs as follows: “No cognates in Germanic, but cf. Norwegian *dogg* ‘boathook; gaff’. The initial meaning may have been **pole, round stick; doll, puppet*”.

One can summarize the evidence presented above so: Icel. *doggur* is late, and its origin is unknown; its only probable cognate is Norw. *dogg*, which, like *doggur*, designates an implement. However, the relevant objects differ: a vertical cylindrical object versus a boathook. Not improbably, *gg* in the root alternates with *kk*, but this conjecture cannot be substantiated. With this conclusion in view, it may be useful to examine briefly the history of Engl. *dog*.

The most common statement in dictionaries is short: “Origin unknown.” However, the literature on *dog* is huge, the conjectures are many,

and the findings in some more recent articles are significant. A few misleading look-alikes, such as Engl. *dodge*, Old Icel. *dugga* ‘a headstrong intractable person’, and the Old English personal name *Dycga* should probably be ignored.

Speakers of Old English called the dog *hund*. In our earliest texts, only the form *docgena*, the genitive plural of the unattested word **docga* appeared, and only a single time in the *Boulogne Prudentius Glosses*. It was applied contemptuously to the pagan henchman of the torturer Dacianus by their victim Vincentius and rendered Latin *canum*. The *canum* ~ *docgena* pair makes it certain that *docgena* did indeed mean ‘of (the) dogs’, and we note with surprise that the word’s pejorative sense turned up long before the regular, neutral one. It had either gained some currency as vulgar slang by the middle of the eleventh century and was avoided in writing or the glossator used an animal name current in his dialect, but unknown elsewhere (the glosses in question do contain rather many words not attested elsewhere). As regards word formation, **docga*, with *cg* standing for *gg*, would have had the same structure as the recorded oldest forms of *frog*, *stag*, (*ear*)*wig*, and less certainly, *pig*. Those were hypocoristic words of the same type, though with a different suffix, as in Modern Engl. *doggie* and *froggie*.

I will pass by the rather numerous but futile attempts to find Greek and Latin cognates of *dog*. By contrast, the related forms in Germanic are worthy of attention. Many modern languages have the word *dog*, and, whenever it appears, it is said to be a borrowing of Engl. *dog*. This pronouncement should not be accepted *dogmatically*. (It is hard to believe, but some brave amateurs did derive *dog* from *dogma*!)

Today, few people consult the works of the once renowned German philologist August Pott (1802–1887). One of his many publications is an essay on dogs (Pott, 1863). He cited an astounding number of words for “dog”, among which we find *dodel* (apparently recorded in a German dialect of Alsace; the reference is unclear) and *döggel* from Schleswig.

It is often impossible to determine the age of the otherwise unknown local and isolated words. They may be old or late, native or borrowed. Engl. *dog* ousted *hound*, that is, *hund*, in Middle English, when it became a generic animal name, with *hound* retaining the sense ‘hunting dog, dog kept for the chase’. *Döggel* may be a diminutive form taken over from English, but there is no certainty. In any case, *dodel* looks native. Even more instructive than Pott’s is the work of Werner Flechsig (1966), who investigated the name for “bitch” in Ostfalia (Low Saxony).

In his discussion of the word *Tache* and its eighteenth-century synonym *Tiggel*, he suggested that they might be cognate with *dog*. *Tiggel* resembles *döggel*: both are diminutive forms, like *dodel*, and belong with the Old English animal names ending in *ga* (see above). Pott mentioned *Teckel*.

Most likely, *dog* arose as a baby word. Not to be missed are two studies: by Ulrike Roider (1982) and Thomas Markey (1983). Roider listed German dialectal *dogke* ‘a foolish woman; doll’, related to German *Docke* ‘doll’. Old dolls were often short pieces of wood dressed like manikins. One of the senses of Engl. *dock* is ‘the solid fleshy part of a horse’s tail; crupper, rump’ (hence the verb *dock* ‘to remove the end of the tail; cut short’). Roider suggested that Engl. *dog* is allied to *Docke* and that it got its name from the practice of docking dogs’ tails. There must have been a less tortuous path from “doll” to “dog”. Children regularly use the same monosyllable for a variety of objects, including toys and pets: the object’s form and function do not matter. Presumably, *dog* and its phonetic variants had limited currency in English and Low German; yet *dog* eventually edged out *hound*.

Markey (1983) cited similar Low German words in his discussion of *dog*. They mean “girl; doll; clump, straw bundle”. Like Roider (1982), whose work he had naturally not read, he referred to breeds of dogs with artificially abbreviated tails. But I think he, too, erred and that he went astray in following Eric Hamp’s etymology of *pig* and reconstructing the basic meaning of all those words as “small, young”. Hamp connected Engl. *pig* and Danish *pige* ‘girl’. Both words are of unclear origin, and nothing harms a sought-for etymology more than attempts to explain an obscure word by referring to another obscure one. Incidentally, *pig* is also an upstart; it superseded *swine*. In *pige*, *g* goes back to *k* (late Old Icel. *pika*; the connection with Finnish *piika* has not been clarified to everybody’s satisfaction). To reiterate my tentative conclusion: *dog* is a baby word, which in the beginning had a wide range of application, from ‘doll; puppet’ to ‘pet; dog’. *Pig* might be a close neighbor (*d - g ~ p - g* and any vowel in the middle).

Here are a few more words of the type discussed above. In Modern German, *Docke* means ‘a ball of thread; bundle’, ‘doll’ is dialectal (the Standard word for “doll” is *Puppe*). Old High German *tocka ~ tocha* has been recorded with the sense ‘puppet’, but Middle High German *tocke* meant ‘puppet; girl; cylindrical object; windlass; bunch’. Especially surprising is ‘cylindrical object’, because, as we have seen, one of the senses of Icel. *doggur* is also ‘vertical cylindrical object’. In the middle of the fifteenth century, Engl. *dog* began to be used for various “mechanical

devices, usually [!] having or consisting of a tooth or claw, used for gripping or holding” (the original formulation in the OED). Despite the word *usually*, all the devices listed in the entry are indeed for gripping, drawing, and holding (hooks, bars, screws, nippers, and so forth). Some of the implements are called ‘cat’, and we’ll return to this fact below. The metaphor behind the name (“a thing with teeth”) is obvious. The same idea must have occurred to people everywhere (cf. Russian *sobachka* ‘trigger’, literally, ‘little dog’ – a borrowing of French *chien* or an independent formation?).

In the Scandinavian languages, outside Modern Icelandic, one observes Old Icel. *dokka* ‘windlass’ (a late borrowing from Low German), ‘doll’; Norwegian *dokke* ~ *dukke* ‘doll’; Swedish *docka* (< *dokka*), and Danish *dukke* ‘short column; doll; puppet’. Norwegian *dogg* ‘boathook, gaff’ has already been mentioned. ÁBM suggests the initial meaning of Icel. *doggur* to have been *‘pole, round stick; doll, puppet’.

4. A Preliminary Approach to the Origin of *sitja up við dogg* and Engl. *lie doggo*

ÁBM’s set of heterogeneous reconstructed meanings (‘pole, round stick; doll, puppet’) causes surprise, but a broader look at the evidence presented above failed to yield better results. The Middle High German glosses of *Docke* (‘puppet; straw bundle’ and ‘staircase support’) point to a similar union of soft and hard objects. It seems that any round (“cylindrical”) thing, long and sturdy structure (a staircase support, a windlass), tall mannequin (doll), and even some pet animal (puppy) could be called *dog* or *dock*; the frequent use of diminutive suffixes points to baby language. The confusion of *g* and *k* makes our wanderings among such words especially hard, because this confusion is predictable only in German. (A brief digression: not only Engl. *dock* ‘stump, etc.’, with its protomeaning *‘something round’ is obscure; for *dock* ‘herb’ and *dock* ‘a creek in which a ship rests’ dictionaries can only cite cognates; *dock* ‘an enclosure in a criminal court’ is impenetrable.)

There were two ways from the ancient symbiosis. One led to the establishment of animal names; it was taken by English and some German dialects. The other way led to the naming of devices, predominantly, but not necessarily, round. In English, the records of *dog* ‘device, implement’ do not antedate the late Middle period. Perhaps earlier occurrences are unknown to us, but, more probably, the words listed in the OED (see

them above) reached England from the continent as part of the itinerant artisans' *lingua franca*. I have discussed two such words in the past: *adz(e)* (in the 2008 dictionary) and *ajar* in Liberman (2014).

The records of the Icelandic words are so late that all hypotheses are doomed to remain guesswork. Even in Icelandic, the merger of *dog* and *dok* is possible, especially in such words with voiceless sound groups as *doggslegur* 'weak'. We occasionally note an unexpected combination of senses: cf. Icel. *dogginn* 'persistent' and 'depressed', ? from 'staying in the same state'. Building semantic bridges is easy; that is why they collapse with such regularity. One gets the impression that some *dog* ~ *dok* adjectives could be used loosely, with semantic borders shifting or blurred, while the related nouns functioned like synonyms of Engl. *thingamabob*.

Whatever the etymology of such words, *sitja up* (*liggja*, *hallast*, *risa*) *up við dogg* has nothing to do with the animal name *dog*. The English case is less clear. Perhaps some light comes from the simile *dead as a door-nail*. It seems to have been coined in allusion to nails driven deep, to the tack, into wood and remaining immobile. Some such image, evoked by *doggur* 'a long round vertical object', may have been at play in Icelandic, regardless of whether *doggur* was native or, more likely, a borrowing (or an adaptation) of a Low German word. Judging by final *o* in *doggo*, Engl. *doggo* was hardly coined in England. The late emergence of the phrase in Kipling points in the same direction. The source might be, as presumably in Icelandic, some Low German *dog* form, and it too may have been part of North Sea Germanic handymen's professional argot. The connection with the habits of sleeping dogs is, in my opinion, due to folk etymology. The association of objects made for gripping and pulling with dogs is common in many parts of Europe, but this fact should not undermine the suggestion that the name of the implement existed parallel to, rather than as a derivative from, the animal name.

5. The English idiom *it rains cats and dogs*

As is well-known, the idiom means 'it pours with rain.' Its origin keeps puzzling speakers, but most of the explanations offered in the past should be discarded as fanciful. The phrase has been traced to French *cantaloupe* 'waterfall' (then a product of either a naïve pronunciation or folk etymology); to Greek *katà doxas* (? 'down in full force'); to the fact that torrential rains carried along with them the refuse of the streets, including many dead animals; to the Scandinavian myth in which a cat is

said to be influenced by the coming storm (there is no such myth!); to the superstition that cats were transformed witches, while dogs were the hounds of Odin (Óðinn), the god of storms (however, Óðinn was not a thunder god or a weather god and had no such hounds); to cats and dogs pattering across a bare boarded floor, strongly resembling the sound of a heavy downpour of rain; to Italian *tempo cattivo* ‘bad weather’; to the word *catodupe*, meaning a cataract (“the great katadoupeo – the cataracts of the Nile, from *katadoupeo* – to fall with a heavy sound. It is raining cats and dogs – it is raining cataracts”). It will be seen that many authors were satisfied by accounting for *cats*, as though the second word of the idiom (*dogs*) did not matter.

However, it was known rather early that the full (original) text of the idiom was *it rains cats and dogs and little pitchforks*, alternating with *it rains cats and dogs and pitchforks with their points downwards*. The note by N. E. Toke (1918) deserves being reproduced almost in full:

The “New English Dictionary” [= OED], under the heading “cat” 17, quotes G. Harvey, “Pierce’s Super”, 8 (1592), “Instead of thunderboltes shooteth nothing but dogboltes or catboltes”. This seems nearer the mark, but it is impossible to judge without the context, and this I do not know. By the way, “dogbolts” and “catbolts” are terms still employed in provincial dialect to denote, respectively, the iron bars for securing a door or gate, and the bolts for fastening together pieces of timber (see “English Dialect Dictionary” [by Joseph Wright]). A variety of the very popular game of trap and ball was called provincially “cat and dog” – the “dog” being the club with which the players propelled the “cat”, i.e. the piece of wood which, as in the game of tip-cat, did duty for the ball. If a number of players were engaged in this game and they grew excited, it might easily be said that it “rained cats and dogs” on the playing field. Could the expression have arisen in this way? A “dog” also means a portion of a rainbow, and generally precedes or accompanies squall at sea. In this connection, the “English Dialect Dictionary” quotes “It’ll mebbe be fine i’ t’afternoon if t’ thunner keeps off, but there’s too many little dogs about” (West York[shire]). The connection of “dogs” with a downpour of rain is accounted for by this use of the word. Some humorists may have added “cats”, and the phrase, thus originated, may have caught the popular fancy. But this is merely a suggestion, and I should be glad of a less hypothetical explanation.

The OED offers the closest approximation to the phrase dated to a. 1652. The quotation from Harvey is now dated to 1593 (at *dog bolt*). The reference to the rainbow is curious, but it does not account for *cats* in the idiom. Also, the evidence of pitchforks (with their points downward) cannot be shaken off. Apparently, the original idea was that a downpour of sharp objects fell to the ground. Later, *catbolts* and *dogbolts* lost their second elements, and the phrase became more elegant but senseless.

I hope that the history of the idiom will reinforce the idea that in the enigmatic phrase *lie doggo*, the reference is to some inanimate object. Perhaps the phrase was coined by players in a popular game rather than by wandering handymen (note *dog* ‘club’; reminiscent of the supports and cylindrical objects, mentioned above). We may never know. The important thing in this case is to let the sleeping dogs lie and not bother etymologists.

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