

Shaggy Dogs and Black Sheep: The Origins of Even More Phrases We Use Every Day, 2006, 272 pages, Albert Jack, 0141039566, 9780141039565, Penguin Adult, 2006

The English language is crammed with colourful phrases and sayings that we use without thinking every day. It's only when we're asked who smart Alec or Holy Moly were, where feeling in the pink or once in a blue moon come from, or even what letting the cat out of the bag really means that we realize that there's far more to English than we might have thought. Luckily enough, we now have Albert Jack. And rather than resting on his laurels after the enormous success of Red Herrings and White Elephants, he has continued his search around the world, exploring the origins of hundreds more phrases. The fascinating stories he has uncovered come from the rich traditions of the navy, army and law to confidence tricksters and highwaymen, from the practices of ancient civilizations to Music Hall and pubs. Determined to chase each shaggy dog story to the bitter end, his discoveries are even stranger and more memorable this time round. Shaggy Dogs and Black Sheep is a compulsively readable, highly enlightening look at the phrases we use all the time but rarely consider. From the skin of your teeth to the graveyard shift you'll never speak (or even think) English in the same way again.

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