

Common Middle English Words

The following list represents some of the more common Middle English words that can cause some difficulty to the modern reader. "Also watch for metathesis (inverted letters) such as spelling the word "Bird" as "Brid." (adapted from Dr Kip Wheeler's site - http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/Middle_English_terms2.html)

- **al, al be, al be that:** although, even if
- **als, also:** also, as
- **anon:** at once, immediately
- **aventure:** chance
- **bet:** better
- **burg; berg:** city; town; cf. modern "Pittsburg"
- **but, but if:** unless
- **can, kan, conne, konne:** to be able, to know, to know how; to learn, to understand.
- **con:** did (indicator of completed past tense action, comparable to the way "gone" is used in some rural American dialects, i.e., "He gone and done it! That boy gone got married!")
- **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
- **conseil:** council; to counsel or advise; secret(s), confidence(s)
- **corage:** heart; spirit; courage; desire
- **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. Mn. E. "dent")
- **dom:** judgment; decision. (cf. Mn. English "doom")
- **do, doon:** to do, cause. doon make: cause to be made
- **drede:** doubt "it is no drede" (there is no doubt).
- **eek, eke:** also
- **er, ere:** before
- **eyen, eien, yen:** eyes (see also ye for the singular)
- **falle:** fall; befall, happen
- **fare:** fare, go; act, behave
- **fayne:** (as an adjective) 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
- **for- (prefix)** an intensifier attached to verbs or adjectives, roughly equivalent of "very"
- **fre, free:** noble, gracious, generous; free
- **fro:** from (as in "to and fro")
- **gentillesse:** refined character, high breeding, nobility, courtesy
- **go, goon:** to walk, to go
- **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
- **hente(n):** to seize, grasp
- **highte:** is called, is named; was called, was named
- **ic, iche, i:** first person pronoun "I"
- **ilke:** same; the same type
- **kinde, kynde:** nature, race, stock, species, sort; natural disposition
- **koude:** knew; knew how to; could
- **lat:** let
- **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
- **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)
- **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
- **sen, syn:** since
- **seker, siker:** true, certain, noble, sure (distantly related to Mn. English "secure" and "sacred.")
- **sely:** blessed, innocent; good; kind; happy; poor; wretched; hapless (Cf. Mn. Irish seelie, Mn. English silly)
- **sentence:** opinion, sentiments; moral meaning, significance
- **siker:** certain, sure, true
- **sikerly:** certainly, surely, truly
- **sith, sithen:** since
- **solas:** comfort, solace; amusement, entertainment; pleasure
- **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.")
- **sythes:** since, after
- **ther, there:** there; where
- **thilke:** the same (contraction of "the ilke")
- **tho:** then trowe(n): to believe
- **war:** aware; wary; prudent
- **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
- **wol:** will
- **wood:** crazy, mad, insane
- **woot:** knows (from "wit")
- **wyse:** wise; way, manner
- **yaf:** gave
- **ye, ey, yghe:** eye
- **yif:** if; give
- **ywis:** certainly, surely