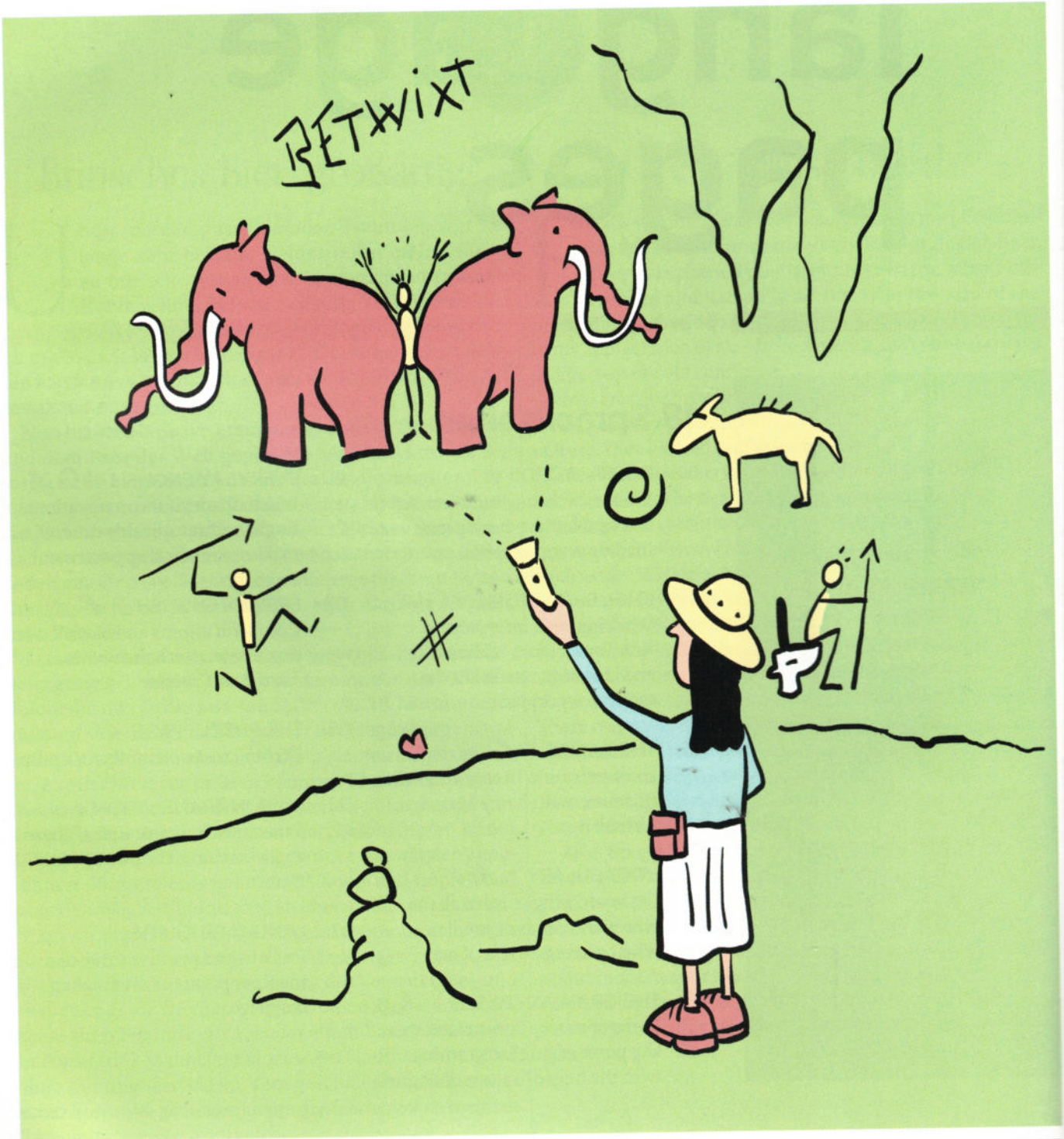# Fossil words

VANESSA CLARK gräbt ein wenig in der Sprachgeschichte und hebt die reinsten Wortschätze: Begriffe, die eigentlich schon lange ausgestorben, aber in einzelnen Wendungen in aller Schönheit erhalten geblieben sind.

MEDIUM

Fossils – beautiful creatures, as old as time, perfectly <u>preserved</u> in stone. The English language, too, has its fossils – wonderfully <u>archaic</u> words from earlier centuries, perfectly preserved in idioms and set phrases, or in legal or religious language. We often use them without even noticing – but here, we bring them to the surface and polish them for you to admire.

For each fossil word, we give you a modern English synonym or equivalent (in bold), an example sentence and a short explanation. Enjoy our dig!

Left in the lurch

BELOVED

dearly loved

"With thanks to my <u>beloved</u> wife"
The meaning of this word is clear, but its form is very old. The lovely, old-fashioned term has a timeless quality that lends itself to the more serious moments in life, particularly in times of loss. Traditionally, a priest will <u>address</u> the <u>congregation</u> as "Dearly beloved".

LEST

for fear that, in order to avoid

"<u>Lest</u> we forget"
This phrase is often used on <u>war memorials</u> or in church services of <u>remembrance</u> for fallen soldiers and other victims of war. "Lest we forget" means "Let us ensure that we don't forget". This Old English word has a serious, old-fashioned, biblical sound to it.

FORTHWITH

immediately, without delay

"We require that payment be made <u>forthwith</u>."
A lawyer might still use "forthwith" to push for a quick response. It's not used in everyday conversation – unless you want to sound amusingly old-fashioned. If your partner asks you to bring them a cup of coffee, you could, for example, <u>bow</u> deeply and say: "I shall do it forthwith, sir or madam. Your wish is my command!"

BETWIXT

between

"Her spirit hovered <u>betwixt</u> this world and the next."
"Betwixt" – or just "'twixt" – is an old alternative to "between". It has largely died out, but you might hear it in a <u>spooky</u> ghost story, where things happen in the <u>twilight zone</u> – "betwixt day and night" or "'twixt life and death". It's still also used in the combination "betwixt and between", which means "neither one thing nor the other", such as: "I'm not sure if this TV programme is a reality show or a drama. It's a bit betwixt and between."

LEFT IN THE LURCH

put in a difficult situation, <u>abandoned</u>

"They pulled out of the deal at the last minute, leaving us in the <u>lurch</u>."
"Lurch" (or "Lourche") was a French board game popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the game, which was a little like backgammon, a "lurch" was a hopeless position where a player had no chance of winning, leaving them "in the lurch". We can no longer play the game because its exact rules have been lost, but the expression lives on.

henceforth
➤ fortan

request for absence
➤ Abwesenheitsantrag

forfend sth. *(arch.)*
➤ etw. verhüten

fossilize
➤ zum Fossil werden

upset sb.
➤ jmdn. verärgern

wend: ~ one's way
➤ sich begeben

stroll
➤ schlendern

deception
➤ Betrug, Trickserei

manual dexterity
➤ Fingerfertigkeit

sleight: ~ of hand [slaɪt]
➤ Taschenspielertrick

sly
➤ schlau, listig

fiancé [fiˈɒnseɪ]
➤ Verlobter

fiancée [fiˈɒnseɪ]
➤ Verlobte

betrothed [bɪˈtrəʊðd]
➤ Verlobter, Verlobte

to and fro
➤ hin und her

albeit [ɔːlˈbiːɪt]
➤ obgleich, obschon

persistent
➤ beständig

HENCEFORTH

from now on, from today

"Henceforth, all requests for absence must be made in writing."
"Hence" means "from this place" or "from this time", and "forth" means "fowards". Together, "henceforth" means "from this point on" or "in future". It sounds very formal and can be useful in announcements about upcoming changes to rules and regulations.

FORFEND

to prevent, to forbid

"Heaven forfend!"
Originally, "forfend" simply meant "to forbid". While its use has died out, it remains fossilized in the phrase "Heaven forfend!" meaning "May God prevent this!" It's said as a kind of prayer to protect against bad things in the future: "I don't want to upset anyone. Heaven forfend!" Nowadays, you're more likely to hear people say "Heaven forbid!"

WEND YOUR WAY

to go slowly or by an indirect route

"They wended their way through the park."
These days, we don't usually "wend" anywhere, but the old phrase "to wend one's way" has a lovely feeling of strolling, of taking the slow route. Tourist guides invite you to "wend your way through the streets of the old town". Streets, rivers and streams can also "wend their way" – they're not in a rush to get anywhere. The word is related to the German *wenden*.

Heaven forfend!

SLEIGHT OF HAND

deception (especially through manual dexterity)

"He stole my credit card by sleight of hand."
The noun "sleight" is related to the adjective "sly" and has a sense of clever trickery. The word has died out except in the phrase "sleight of hand" – the skill magicians use for card tricks or to pull a coin out of your ear. The phrase is also used metaphorically – politicians can use "sleight of hand" with facts or statistics to make things seem better than they are.

BETROTHED

fiancé, fiancée

"When are we going to meet your betrothed?"
Your "betrothed" is the person you're engaged to marry. The "-troth" part means "truth" or "loyalty" and "be-" is similar to the German prefix. In modern English, we use the French words *fiancé* and *fiancée*, but why not add a touch of old-fashioned elegance and say "betrothed" instead?

## TO AND FRO

forwards and backwards

"I drove to and fro between my house and the office all day long."
This nice-sounding phrase originated in the 1820s, but the "fro" ("from") is much older and is used only in this expression. It means "moving first in one direction and then the other, many times". It can also describe the many discussions or arguments between two sides that cannot agree. As with the German *hin und her*, "to and fro" – or even "to-ing and fro-ing" – can suggest a frustrating or unnecessary level of stress in repeatedly going between two places or options: "There was a huge amount of to and fro before they finally reached a decision." A similar old expression is "back and forth".

ALBEIT

although it is, even if only

"He has a speaking role in the film, albeit a small one."
You won't be surprised to hear that "albeit" is a shortening of a longer phrase: "all though it be". The word has a good history, appearing in both Chaucer and Shakespeare, and has seen a rise in usage in the past 30 years or so. The reference book *Fowler's Modern English Usage* once described "albeit" as "one of the most persistent archaic-sounding words in the language".
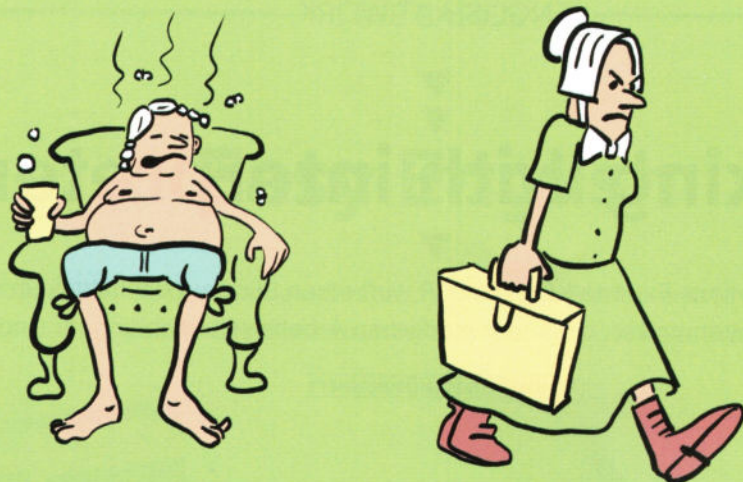
Do not forsake me, oh my darling!

KITH AND KIN
friends and relations

"They've invited their whole <u>kith and kin</u> to the wedding."

Both of these words come from Old English. "Kith" originally meant "the people from your homeland" or "countryfolk" – essentially, "your neighbours" and, in more modern terms, "your friends". "Kin" are "family", whether by birth or by marriage. "Kith" is never used outside of this old phrase, whereas "kin" is still used in formal contexts, such as studying "kinship groups" in sociology. The title of the Australian comedy TV series *Kath and Kim* is probably a playful reference to this phrase.

TAKE UMBRAGE
to take offence, to be offended

"He took <u>umbrage</u> at my comments and ended the conversation."

Like "umbrella", "umbrage" comes from the Latin *umbra*, meaning "shade", "shadow" or "darkness". This dark, shady word from the early 15th century gave J. K. Rowling the name for the <u>nasty</u> Hogwarts teacher Dolores Umbridge.

FORSAKE
to leave, to give up, to abandon

"Do not <u>forsake</u> me."

As the song in the 1952 classic western *High Noon* says: "Do not forsake me, oh my darling" – don't leave me. "Forsake" has biblical origins. On the cross, Jesus cries out: "Father, why hast <u>Thou</u> forsaken me?" – Why have you abandoned me? In their <u>wedding vows</u>, couples promise to stay together, "forsaking all others" – giving up the option of having other partners.

TAKEN ABACK
surprised, shocked, confused

"I was rather taken <u>aback</u> by his negative reaction." While we still use the old prepositions and adverbs "around", "about", "along" and "away" to describe movement in various directions, another such word, "aback", has fallen out of use, except in this phrase. As you can guess, it means "towards the back" or "backwards". When something shocks you, you're "taken aback" because it feels as if you've been knocked backwards.

TRUSTY
reliable, faithful, long-serving

"I love my <u>trusty</u> old VW Golf."

A "trusty car" is obviously one you can trust. It's served you well for many years and has never let you <u>down</u>. The usual adjective for something you can trust is "trustworthy", so why say "trusty"? The word dates back to <u>medieval</u> stories in which kings had "trusty servants" and <u>knights</u> rode "trusty <u>steeds</u>". Today, you might say that you have a "trusty kitchen knife" (one that always cuts well) or "trusty walking boots" (which have taken you up many mountains). It sounds strange to have a "trusty iPhone" – but why not?

BY DINT OF
because of, as a result of, thanks to

"She got her promotion by <u>dint</u> of hard work, not through her connections."

Today, the archaic word "dint" survives only in the expression "by dint of", which is used to describe how something was achieved. The Old English "dynt" originally meant a "strike" or a "blow". By the end of the 16th century, it meant "the power or force behind a blow", from which we get the sense of making something happen.

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kith and kin [kɪθ]
➤ Kind und Kegel

offence: take ~
➤ sich angegriffen fühlen

offended: be ~
➤ beleidigt sein

umbrage: take ~ (at) [ˈʌmbrɪdʒ]
➤ Anstoß an etw. nehmen

nasty
➤ gemein

forsake
➤ entsagen

thou [ðaʊ] (*arch.*)
➤ du

wedding vow
➤ Ehegelübde, Jawort

aback: be taken ~
➤ bestürzt sein

trusty
➤ getreu

down: let sb. ~
➤ jmdn. enttäuschen

medieval [ˌmediˈiːvəl]
➤ mittelalterlich

knight [naɪt]
➤ Ritter

steed
➤ Ross, Pferd

dint: by ~ of
➤ kraft, vermöge

INFO TO GO

Old verb forms that end in "-th" in the third-person singular have an "-s" in modern English: "The Lord giveth [gives] and the Lord taketh [takes] away."