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A bit o' footy rabbit: Some notes on football rhyming slang

<https://doi.org/10.1515/les-2020-0002>

Abstract: The use of rhyming slang in British and Irish football is a relatively recent phenomenon that has sometimes been noted in passing, but never studied in detail. How is this type of lexis created? And, equally important, why do football lovers find it useful? Drawing mainly on examples from print and online sources, this article examines the linguistic features of the specialist rhyming slang of football, how it is coined and what it is that makes it so appropriate for the beautiful game. The final part of the article provides a glossary of terms and nicknames, many of which have hitherto escaped the notice of lexicographers.

Keywords: rhyming slang, football language, word-formation, nicknames, slang lexicography

1 Introduction

Slang is largely ephemeral and subject to the vagaries of fashion, but some of the processes underlying its creation have a lasting effect on the language at large. One such process is rhyming slang (hereafter RS), a type of word making in which a lexeme (typically a multi-word expression) is used as a substitute for another lexeme it rhymes with. On this simple but rather uneconomical principle, a person may be described as having beautiful *mince pies* 'eyes', lovely *Barnet Fair* 'hair' and nice *bacon and eggs* 'legs', even though their *I suppose* 'nose' (or *pea-shooter* 'hooter', as some might prefer to call it) may be a bit on the large side. It is not hard to see why Wright (1981: 95) once referred to this ingenious lingo as "a form of verbal indigestion", an extreme oddity indeed in a subset of the lexicon where brevity and abbreviation reign supreme.

Although essentially based on rhyme, RS terms are occasionally informed, reinforced or partially triggered by a semantic link with the referent or concept they represent. It just cannot be a coincidence, for example, that *Stuart Diver*, the

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sole survivor of the 1997 Thredbo landslide, became Australian RS for *survivor*. Clearly, something more than rhyme is also at work in *Saddam Hussein* 'a pain (i.e. an irritating or troublesome person)', *Neptune's daughter* 'water', *cough and choke* 'a smoke', *liquid toffee* 'coffee' and *Percy Thrower* 'a mower', the last courtesy of the late doyen of British TV gardening shows. Semantic motivation is, nonetheless, the exception rather than the rule.

One thing making this style of expression somewhat of a challenge for the unversed is that the rhyming part of the lexeme is often dropped, thus making the connection between form and sense virtually impossible to unravel. Many people would be taken aback to learn that the colloquial *berk* 'a fool' hails from *Berkeley* or *Berkshire Hunt*, itself a euphemistic surrogate for the body part Captain Francis Grose in his gloriously titled *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* referred to as 'the monosyllable' (see Grose 1788: e.g. s.v. *bottomless pit*). But obviously we do not need to know where a word comes from in order to find it useful. Other reduced RS items that, like *berk*, have quietly slipped into standard British English include *rabbit* 'to chatter', a shortening of *rabbit and pork* 'to talk', also used in slang as a noun (as in the title of this article); *not on your nelly* 'not on your life, certainly not', where *nelly* is short for *Nelly Duff* 'puff (i.e. breath of life, and thus a metonym for life itself)'; and *loaf* 'a person's head' (usually in the phrase *use one's loaf* 'to use one's common sense'), the elliptical version of *loaf of bread*.

Nearly two centuries after the earliest recorded use of this form of slang,¹ the process has remained a prolific source of new words in English, many of which have shown remarkable powers of endurance. The most comprehensive collection of RS made in recent years, Lillo and Victor's (2017) *A Dictionary of English Rhyming Slangs* (hereafter *DoERS*), contains over 9,000 items, nearly three times as many as that of Green (2000), Ayto (2002) and Puxley (2008). But even more noteworthy than the dictionary's constant accretion of RS is the sheer breadth of its spread, itself both a cause and a consequence of its rapid growth. Originally starting out as part of the private language of London's underworld and underclass (see Mayhew 1850; Hotten 1859: 133–137), RS can now be found in almost every corner of the anglophone world, from Glasgow to Hong Kong, from Sydney to Washington, and across a wide spectrum of social groups (see Franklyn 1960: 15–21; Lillo 2004a, 2010, 2012, 2013; *DoERS*: x-xii).

¹ Although the first dictionary to list a modest but significant body of RS was Ducange Anglicus's *The Vulgar Tongue* (1857), the process had been active to a greater or lesser extent since at least the 1820s. The two earliest examples I am aware of are *Jack-a-dandy* 'brandy' and *lord of the manor* 'sixpence' (via the rhyme on *tanner*), recorded in Cooper (1828: act 1, sc. 4) and Brandon (1839) respectively.

As even the most casual perusal of any current slang dictionary will show, sex, money, intoxication and sundry weaknesses of mind and character are areas of high lexical density in RS. Many areas of activity have also been well served by its coiners. One of those is the world of sports, especially horse racing (Hibberd/Hutchinson 1983; Wallish 1989), boxing (Blumberg 1968: 25), darts (George/Chaplin 2011) and football (in the usual British sense of the word). This is due both to the inherently light-hearted nature of RS, which makes it apt for the bantering atmosphere of sporting contexts, and to the link between some sports and games and the gambling underworld, a fertile breeding ground for slang since at least the seventeenth century (see B. E. ca. 1698; Clark 1987; Room 2010). It is certainly telling in this regard that one of the mediums through which RS became known to the general public in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was precisely the sporting press (think the *Sporting Life* and the *Sporting Times*). No less august a figure than Henry Bradley, writing in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, went as far as to claim, with deliberate hyperbole, no doubt, that the sporting newspapers seemed to be the only place where RS had “any considerable currency” (Bradley 1911).

Given that RS is a playful code, there can be nothing more natural than to use it when watching or discussing games. This manifests itself most clearly in footballing discourse, where the occasional sprinkling of rhyming words on the part of aficionados, expert analysts and, to a lesser extent, players and managers never fails to brighten the atmosphere.² That the users of this code are almost invariably male is no surprise. While great strides are being made to make “the people’s game” more inclusive for women at all levels (see, inter alia, Jeanes 2006; Dunn/Welford 2017), it is still very much the province of the alpha male and the über-lad who lives life by what Mac an Ghaill (1994: 56) calls the “three Fs”: fighting, fucking and football. Football is, along with horse racing and motor racing, “one of the last bastions of masculine domination” (Butler 2013: 1309). And like the game itself, its slang is unabashedly and self-consciously masculine (see Dent 2016: 150; cf. Martin 2005), one of its main social functions being to forge a sense of group belonging and male bonding. The geezerish nature of RS and its capacity to conjure up comical, surreal images in our heads (take for example ‘a *Buddy Holly* smashing the *bass guitar*’ for ‘a *volley* smashing the *bar*’) help to create a sense of belonging among “the boys”.

² Interestingly, despite being more directly involved in the game, or perhaps at least in part because of it, players and managers tend to be less linguistically creative (cf. Dent 2003: 51, 2004: 49).

The aim of this article is to examine and unpack the workings of the specialist RS of football, a corner of the slang lexicon that, so far as I know, has not received scholarly attention. Football English, of course, is not a single, monolithic variety, but comprises several sublects or registers associated with different situations of use, each with its own peculiar characteristics (see Bergh/Ohlander 2012: 18–19; Lewandowski 2014). The cliché-ridden language of commentators, journalists, players and managers, as masterfully dissected by Leigh/Woodhouse (2005) and Hurrey (2014), contrasts starkly with the more spontaneous and vigorous language heard on the terraces or down the pub on a match day. What these variants of the football vernacular have in common is that, because of the informality that goes with the most demotic of all sports, they indulge in various forms of slang and wordplay, including RS and rhyming nicknames for teams, players and managers. In what follows, I will look at the RS coined by the different types of participants in football discourse, a vast and diverse group made up of those involved in the game in one way or another, from players themselves to armchair fans like the present author.

In the last part of this article I present a collection of football terms and nicknames, many of which have thus far eluded slang researchers and lexicographers. Since, as is true of any research endeavour, the proverbial drudgery of lexicography involves building on the work that others (or even oneself) have done before,³ this glossary is divided into four sections, the first two containing the football RS terms and nicknames entered and documented in *DoERS*, and the other two containing a small set of fresh contributions which I have gleaned over the past two or so years and which, to the best of my knowledge, are otherwise unrecorded. The latter are therefore plausible candidates for inclusion in any future dictionary work on RS. To support and enhance my analysis, the main text is buttressed by citations illustrating the lexemes under scrutiny.

2 On the coining of football RS

RS is, as Ayto (2002: xii) puts it, “part of a giant ongoing word-game”. The rules of the game are so simple that anyone with a knack for wordplay can create a new term on the spur of the moment. And “anyone” means exactly that, much to the frustration of slang lexicographers, who are often left with the challenging, if not

³ This is as opposed to just copying or reshaping their materials, two notoriously entrenched practices in slang dictionary- and glossary-making (see Spears 1987; Green 2002; Coleman 2016: 330–332).

impossible, task of separating the authentic from the contrived. There is, in truth, no litmus test for the authenticity of RS. Unlike with other types of word-formation, the paucity of quotations for a given term cannot always be taken as evidence of its lack of genuineness. RS coinages often originate as condensed jokes (therefore, they are deliberately artificial from their birth) and may be in oral circulation for quite some time without ever being noticed by word collectors, recorded in dictionaries or registered in written and spoken corpora. But they are “genuine” as far as RS goes. Many of them probably disappear every year without a trace, except perhaps in our memories, while others are revived or reinvented at various times. For the dictionary maker, the former are, to all intents and purposes, non-existent; the latter may be regarded as bogus and unworthy of lexicographic attention for a good while. My impression is that the resurrection or reinvention of supposedly inauthentic RS terms is far more common than we may suspect.

Digging around in my ever-growing files recently, I was able to push back the first known usage of *Judi Dench* ‘the bench’ (often shortened and variously spelt) to 2003, seven years earlier than the first citation I found a few years ago (see *DoERS*). Judging from the paucity of written records of its use between 2003 and 2010 (the one other example I have unearthed is dated 2009) and its greater frequency of occurrence in print thereafter, we could say with some degree of confidence that this is a twenty-first century coinage.⁴

Emile Hesky should stay on the **Judy**. (<www.cockneyrhymingslang.co.uk>, 8 November 2003) | Martin is very stubborn and for him to put Emile on the **Judi Dench** might look like a slight on his judgment. (<www.theguardian.com>, 11 April 2009)

And yet, when the word surfaced in Britain in the early noughties, it was more of a reinvention (or perhaps an unconscious revival, for we know that our memories trick us with word recollection) than a brand-new coinage. Here is an earlier example that shows how the term, formed from the name of a British actress, had been dreamt up as a joke not long before it became an actual slangism, thus suggesting that the boundaries between bona fide and ersatz RS can be blurred and arbitrary:

[H]ere’s Pandora’s guide to stupid football rhyming slang (OK, the printable bits). [...] Handbags at dawn: X-rated porn. Hit the post: saw a ghost. (On the) bench: **Judi Dench**. Automatic promotion: motion in the ocean. Alex Fergusson’s Salary: New Tate Gallery. (*The Independent*, London, 7 May 1999)

⁴ In the following and subsequent quotations, I have added bold type to highlight RS items.

In the unruly realm of RS, “real” words and “faux” formations do not really constitute a dichotomy; rather, they exist on a continuum with a range of other, often overlapping categories, including one-off usages, family coinages and folk-etymological elaborations of non-RS words. At one end of the continuum are self-conscious nonce creations in which rhyme is used as a vehicle for social comment or satire, or sometimes, as is often the case on forums and social media, just for banter; at the other end are those terms that have become established in usage. *Judi Dench* shows how an item that was once at the “faux” end of the continuum may later be re-minted or unconsciously revived and join the ranks of “real” football slang.

It is that ease with which new words are forged, the short life-span or nonceness of many of them⁵ and the messy, kaleidoscopic nature of the aforementioned continuum that keep RS in a state of constant flux. Therein lies much of its charm for the slang scholar. Footballer-turned-TV pundit Paul Merson, himself a Londoner, is among those who have of late been helping to keep it in the public eye in Britain. Widely known for his zany one-liners and turns of phrase on Sky Sports' *Soccer Saturday*, he has not only been responsible for the popularisation of *beans on toast* (or just *beans* for short) ‘a goalpost’, a term he probably picked up from his playing days,⁶ but has also given us such delightful gems as *Casper the Friendly Ghost* (usually clipped to *Casper*) and *Norfolk coast*:

Paul Merson said, “He’s hit the **beans on toast**”[.] (*Daily Star Sunday*, London, 21 January 2007) | Merson. Legend. “He’s hit the **Casper**”. (<twitter.com>, 15 January 2011) | Uhhh, oww, uhhhhhhh... he must, he must, he must score... oowwwwww... he’s hit the inside of the **Norfolk coast**, Jeff. Still nil-nil. (<www.dangerhere.com>, 6 November 2012)

At first blush, the humour of these specimens lies in the incongruent clash between the existing signifiers and the new meaning that is attached to them in footy parlance, a disjunction that makes them excellent material for puns and bewildering interpretations, as in “Alexis Sanchez has hit the beans on toast more times than a hungry builder” and “[A] man has handcuffed himself to the norfolk

⁵ For a discussion of the importance of studying ephemeral coinages, see Adams (2003: 113–125).

⁶ The earliest instance of *beans on toast* by Merson that I have found so far is from 2007, but the term was already in use, at least among Cockney footballers like Ray Parlour, in the early 2000s. Here is a quotation from that period: “More linguistic tales from Highbury where east London born Ray Parlour (right) is teaching the Gallic contingent rhyming slang. Apparently Thierry Henry talks about his ‘plates of meat’ and Patrick Vieira takes calls on the ‘dog and bone’. Parlour told the Arsenal magazine: ‘Thierry’s favourite at the moment is “beans on toast” (post) and “bass guitar” (bar)’” (*Evening Standard*, London, 10 February 2003).

coast” (<twitter.com>, 4 March 2016 and 31 January 2012). Yet their association with Merson’s pundit persona, who projects himself as the archetypal cheeky London chappie (hence the waggish *Urban Dictionary* definition of *Paul Merson* as ‘rhyming slang for a cheeky person’; <www.urbandictionary.com>, entry posted on 14 March 2010), undoubtedly contributes to their humorous character too. His inventiveness as a wordsmith of sorts, like that of any supposed coiners of RS, should be gauged with caution, though. Merse, as he was fondly known during his playing career, seems to have been the first person ever to use the equally jocular *Sunday roast* (sometimes trimmed to *Sunday*) as a reference to a goalpost.

And he’s smashed it against the **Sunday Roast**. (*Soccer Saturday*, Sky Sports, 30 April 2011) | The post [...] “The **Sunday**” (**Sunday roast**)[...] (Merson 2011: 303)

Still, the former England and Arsenal midfielder was not the first to establish an RS link between the signifiers *Sunday roast* and *post*. When he coined the term to mean ‘a goalpost’, *Sunday roast* had already been in use in British slang to refer to a different kind of *post*, namely ‘the mail’ (Tibballs 2008). This ready-made pairing of *Sunday roast* and *post* paved the way for the former to broaden its semantic range to include another common meaning of the latter. The process I am describing is by no means extraordinary, and the reason is plain: RS works by associating two forms, but the actual meaning is often determined by context. Based on this principle, it is easy to see how *Betty Grable* ‘a football league table’ developed from the pairing of *Betty Grable* and *table*, the latter form being originally attached to the sense ‘a piece of furniture’ (Puxley 1992). Similarly, the football use of *near and far* and *jack tar* ‘a crossbar’ originated as an offshoot of these words’ association with *bar*, whose original and most common use is in the sense ‘a bar for drinks’ (Ware 1909; Franklyn 1960). Even more obvious is *Jack Horner* ‘a corner kick’, the football version of the pairing of *Jack Horner* and *corner* in its basic spatial sense (Brophy/Partridge 1931: 322).

Casuals storm top of the **Betty Grable**. (<wloveaccents.co.uk>, 25 April 2016) | [A]hhh he’s only gone and hit “the **near and far**” in pens ain’t he... Chin up son. (<twitter.com>, 16 July 2011) | Shame the ball went over the **jack tar**. (<twitter.com>, 24 September 2012) | The Imps have just defended a **Jack Horner** – corner – poorly[...] (<www.football.co.uk>, 23 February 2011)

Part of the appeal of these items is the obscure connection that is established between an existing phrase or lexeme (often in the guise of a proper name) and a new meaning, a connection whose logic is all the harder to grasp when the term is used in its reduced form. This accounts for the widespread belief that if two synonymous or semantically related words or phrases rhyme, one of them must

derive from the other.⁷ The football slang *nutmeg* 'a trick in which an attacking player kicks the ball between an opponent's legs' is a case in point:

What is the origin of the term "nutmeg" in football? The term is said to come from Cockney rhyming slang, with *nutmeg* equalling *leg*. When players pushed the ball through a player's leg, London crowds would simply shout "nutmeg"! (*The Times*, London, 3 July 2002)

While it is not impossible that the word originated as RS, perhaps via the plural form *nutmegs*, rhyming on *legs* (see Seddon 2004: 113; Walker 2011: 299) or *through the legs*, this etymological path is patently at odds with the evidence. The first *OED3* quotation for this sense is from 1968, whereas the anatomical usage is not recorded in *DoERS* until 2015:

[T]hree times I pushed the ball between the legs of the same full-back. This is the worst thing a forward can do to a defender because it makes him look foolish; and if, as I did, the forward then shouts "Nut Meg" (the traditional taunt) the defender's ego takes a sharp knock. Three "Nut Megs" was more than this defender, a big fellow, could stand. (Marsh 1968: 33)⁸ | Nutmegs – Legs. "Cor, look at the nutmegs on that!" (Finch 2015: 67)

This suggests it is perhaps more likely that *nutmegs* 'legs' arose as a folk-etymological offshoot (an *ex post facto* RS interpretation, if you will) of the footballing *nutmeg*, the origin of which could well be either in the now largely archaic *nutmegs* 'the testicles' (Dent 2003: 53) or in its more usual synonym *nuts* (Ayto 1990: s.v. *nutmeg*), rather than in RS.

On the other hand, the fact that RS often operates through a double process of elongation (*post* > *Sunday roast*) and ellipsis (*Sunday roast* > *Sunday*), whose end result (*Sunday*) is apparently unconnected with the original base word (*post*), has led some slang enthusiasts to believe that the category of "abbreviated RS" can help to solve just about any etymological puzzle. Consider the term *lollipop* (sometimes embellished as *double lollipop*), a slang reference to the dribbling trick technically known as a *stepover*. The abbreviated RS fallacy postulates that

⁷ This theme is elaborated upon in Lillo (2018).

⁸ The earliest occurrence of *nutmegging* (as a verb and gerund) I have discovered is also in Rodney Marsh's *Shooting to the Top*: "As for the business of nut-megging, it is something I am always looking for a chance to pull off. [...] I agree that, if a defender comes at you, there is no chance of nut-megging him" (Marsh 1968: 83). The first *OED3* citation of the verb in the context of football is dated 1975. Note that both the noun and verb are sometimes reduced to *meg*: "But it was a 'meg' and went through his legs and that's when I went wild" (*The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, 26 May 2014); "Grew in stature as the match wore on but was left dejected on the turf when Lazetic megged him to set up second" (*The Sun*, London, 23 August 2001).

the word, first attested in the late 1990s, means what it does because it is a shortening of *lollipop stick*, rhyming on *trick*:

If a player demonstrates some fancy footwork on the pitch, then it's a lollipop, from lollipop stick, which is rhyming slang for trick. (*Daily Record*, Glasgow, 10 October 2003)

The essence of this fallacy is the assumption that a full form already existed, even though actual evidence of its use is shaky at best. Other than its inclusion in Wilkes (2004), where *lollipop stick* is glossed as 'quick / trick' (two separate uses for the price of one, neither of which is supported by examples, citations or references to sources), the only use, or rather mention, of this form I know of is precisely as an explanation (e.g. Dent 2003: 53; Dalzell/Victor 2006) of the origin of *lollipop*. And that in itself does not prove anything – except that RS is a hot favourite when it comes to etymologising (see Lillo 2018). Most revealingly, not only does the word's putative inventor, former player and manager Ron "Big Ron" Atkinson,⁹ not acknowledge that origin, but among the many other terms and phrases he introduced into the football vernacular while working as a commentator (*little eyebrows* 'a glancing header', *Hollywood ball* 'a long-range pass', etc.; see Mitten 2010: 90), none is in fact RS.

So, please, your Ronness, tell us about the "lollipop", as in "The boy's done a fantastic lollipop, there, Clive". Does it, as dangerhere.com suspects, come from the rhyming slang of "lollipop stick: trick"? "That's not a bad shout. I wish I'd known that – but no, it doesn't. It is a trick, though. It was the only trick I had. I don't know why it's called a lollipop, though!" (*Liverpool Echo*, 19 December 2002)

3 RS nicknames

An essential characteristic of the clannish code of football is the abundance of nicknames for clubs, players and their managers, and RS is a relatively common technique used in their manufacture. In this section I will examine the main features of these nicknames, how they came about and their contexts of use.

⁹ "Ron Atkinson, who brought us 'early doors', 'situation' and the utterly baffling 'lollipops' (his name in the World Cup, you may recall, for the Brazilian Denilson's melodramatic attempted dummies), came out with an instant classic cliché last Tuesday during Tottenham's Worthington (League) Cup win at Northampton" (*The Evening Standard*, London, 3 November 1998).

3.1 Club nicknames

As with other informal monikers, an RS “clubonym” (a term I borrow from Coates’s (2008) study of official club names) can be a double- or even triple-edged sword. It can be a slur, a term of affection or even a badge of honour, often depending on (i) the influence of the basic meaning, or one of the meanings, of the word or phrase on which it is based, (ii) the nature of the underlying target word and (iii) the effect of context, especially who says it to whom, where and when.

(i) THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-RS SENSE OR REFERENCE OF A WORD OR PHRASE ON ITS USE AS AN RS NICKNAME. The basic meaning or reference attached to the immediate etymon of an RS nickname (that is, the word or phrase on which it is based) or to a closely associated lexeme often determines its connotations. Take for example the *Jam Tarts* and the *Watery Farts* (or any variations thereof, for which see below). Both sobriquets are used as RS for *Hearts*, the popular name of Edinburgh’s Heart of Midlothian FC, but their connotations and contexts of use could not be more different. The difference simply stems from the difference in denotation between the nouns *jam tarts* and *watery farts*.

An unprecedented run of thirty-one league and cup games unbeaten over seven months took the **Jam Tarts** to the Scottish Cup Final and within touching distance of the title. (Keane 2018, 53) | I expect the **Watery Farts** to park the bus and for Celtic to huff and puff and pass the ball sideways a lot. (<kerrydalestreet.co.uk>, 1 April 2016)

To the same category as the innocent-sounding *Jam Tarts*¹⁰ belong such informal clubonyms as the *String of Beads* for Leeds United FC, the *Cock and Hens* for the Glens (i.e. Glentoran FC) and the *Harry Wraggs* for the Jags (i.e. Partick Thistle FC), the last a homage to late Sheffield jockey and racehorse trainer Harry Wragg. None of these nicknames lends itself easily to derogation influenced by its etymon. The same, however, is not true of the *Mickey Mousers* (from the demonym *Mickey Mouser*, rhyming on *Scouser*) for Liverpool FC and *Sweaty Socks* (from the slur *Sweaty Sock*, rhyming on *Jock*) to refer to Scots and, by extension, any Scottish club. The former has a strong pejorative whiff about it because of its association with the adjective *Mickey Mouse* ‘second-rate or inferior’, while the latter’s negative force stems not only from the target word *Jocks*, which many Scots find offensive when used by English people (Crofton 2012), but also, and perhaps more crucially, from the literal, non-RS sense of *sweaty socks*. Admit-

¹⁰ Cf. the derogatory *Jamtards*, a blend of *Jam Tarts* and *retards*: “JC loves a goal against the *Jamtards!*” (<twitter.com>, 11 January 2016).

tedly, its cut-down version *sweaties* is a time saver, but does not generally do much to soften its impact (cf. *Sweaty Balmer* below).

“**String a Beads**” game on New Years Eve. (<barnsleyfc.org.uk>, 16 December 2011) | The **Cock and Hens** have a record of 13 victories, five losses and two ties and, in the wondrous words of Brody, “they are on a level with Linfield at the top of the table”. (*Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI, 1 February 1967) | For ever and ever, / We’ll follow the Jags. / The Partick Thistle, / The **Harry Wraggs**. (Thomson 1975: 37) | Gerard Houllier has warned Valencia that his Scousers are not **Mickey Mousers**. [...] We will show the Spanish that we are not a Mickey Mouse team. (*Daily Mirror*, London, 30 October 2002) | The Dunfermline Athletic fan told how the team faced a hostile crowd in the semi-final. [...] They were shouting “here come the **sweaty socks**”[.] (*Scotland on Sunday*, Edinburgh, 26 April 2009) | As they prepared to launch their World Cup bid with a shock win over the team they know as the **Sweaties**, Johnson insisted they’re all speaking from the same phrase book. (*The Sun*, London, 2 September 2000)

(ii) THE NATURE OF THE UNDERLYING TARGET WORD. It is not at all uncommon for a club to have more than one nickname (see Tyas 2013), the effect of each sobriquet being heavily dependent on context and intention. RS nicknames are a slightly different kettle of fish in this respect. Because of the way RS words are formed, many of these nicknames have an intrinsic value directly derived from the words they disguise. They are semantic duplicates, as it were, of their etymons. The sectarianism of the Old Firm rivalry between Glasgow’s two major teams, Celtic and Rangers, has long been an important source of such monikers. Two popular names for Celtic, the *Timalloys* (also *Tim Malloys* or just *Tims*, with an etymological nod to a notorious Glasgow gang from the early twentieth century; see Davies 2013: 21) and the *Vanessa Feltz* (from the name of a British broadcaster), are generally taken as a badge of pride and belonging, for they convey exactly the same positive connotations as their target nicknames the *Bhoys* (a mock-Irish spelling of *boys*) and the *Celts*. Likewise, the *Teddy Bears* (also *Teddies*, *Teds* or *Bears*) and the *Honey Pears*, pronounced and often spelt in Scottish English as *Teddy Berrs* and *Honey Perrrs*, are pragmatically interchangeable with the *Gers*, itself an amiable fore-clipping of *Rangers*.

We shouted for Celtic, we jumped for joy, / We raised our scarves for the **Tim Malloys**. (Daly/Warfield 2008: 451) | Cmon Celtic!!!!!!!, c’mon the **Vanessa feltz**!!!!!! (<twitter.com>, 21 August 2012) | [T]he following year 39,750 saw a league game between Aberdeen and the **Teddy Bears**. (Hyslop 2012: 77) | Just thinking about the Rev James Currie, sadly departed official chaplain to RFC, who was famous for his “Cmon the **Honey Pears**”. (<forum.rangersmedia.co.uk>, 2 December 2013)

By the same token, however, if the underlying word is a slur, the RS clubonym will also replicate its negative value. Anyone familiar with the Scottish football

scene knows that, traditionally and stereotypically, Celtic and Rangers are popularly identified by religious affiliation. Celtic is associated with Glasgow's Catholics of Irish descent, who are often dubbed *Taigs*, *Papes* or *Tarriers*, whereas Rangers are supported by Protestants, often referred to as *Huns*, a semantic development from an anti-German epithet dating back to World War I.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the poisonous mix of sectarianism and humour has yielded a glut of RS dysphemisms based on these slurs. Their offensive potency, like that of their non-RS doppelgängers, depends on how they are used, but the essential jocular-ity of RS renders them inescapably hilarious and, therefore, objectionable. *Taigs*, ultimately from the Irish name *Tadhg*, is disguised as *Earl Haigs* and *William Hagues*; *Papes*, formed on the standard English *papist*, is the rhyming target word of *green grapes* and *sticky tapes*; and *Tarriers*, originally applied to Roman Catholics, has spawned *crash barriers* and *Shettleston Harriers*. Let it be noted, if only in passing, that it is uncertain if *Tarriers* is the same lexeme as the one occurring, for example, in the American song "Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill" (copyrighted by Thomas F. Casey in 1888), where it is used with reference to Irish railroad workers (see Cohen 2000: 531, 555). It seems clear, nevertheless, that the modern usage of the word is influenced by *Tarry Rope*, an RS nickname for the Pope recorded in Northern Ireland, Scotland and northern England (see Tomelty 1941: 70; Munro 1988: 88).

Seeing the **Earl Haigs** 3–0 down makes yesterday all the more difficult to stomach. (<twitter.com>, 17 December 2017) | If i was a player and i scored a last minute winner against the **william hagues** i would celbrate it even more right in front of that lot. (<forum.rangers-mad.co.uk>, 27 September 2012) | Hope he gets a few goals this year against the **green grapes**.[] (<www.hmfckickback.co.uk>, 4 August 2010) | I only got the semi final against the **sticky tapes**. (<www.followfollow.com>, 10 October 2018) | Hopefully by Sunday night rangers are back in Europe and 2 points ahead of the **crash barriers**. (<twitter.com>, 27 August 2018) | Killie 1 **shettleston harriers** 0. (<twitter.com>, 3 February 2018)

On the Rangers side, *Huns* has also served as a target word for a number of RS nicknames used chiefly by their arch-rivals, Celtic. These include *Currant Buns* (sometimes spelt *Current Buns* and often reduced to *Currants* or *Currents*), *Cream Buns*, *Paris Buns*, *Sticky Buns*, *hot cross buns*, *cheesy buns*, *mouldy buns* and *Capri Suns*.

¹¹ Far from being confined to the Old Firm, these sectarian slurs are also applied to other Scottish teams whose fan bases are traditionally perceived as Protestant or Catholic. The most prominent are Heart of Midlothian, Dundee and Kilmarnock, which fall into the Protestant category, and Hibernian and Dundee United, which are seen as Catholic. On the Germanophobic use of *Hun* during World War I, see Walker (2017: 167–169).

I bet you think you're a hero after beating the **Currant Buns** in your first game. (*The Sun*, London, 28 July 2001) | [O]ur impotence in front of goal gifted the **Cream Buns** the most unlikely of titles (and the subsequent CL revenue). (Harper 2011: 383) | Perhaps it failed its MOT, having been overused in getting the many Euro Superstars to Glasgow to sign for the **Paris Buns**. (<kerrydalestreet.co.uk>, 21 June 2005) | I'm not exactly ecstatic that the **Sticky Buns** won the title at our ground, but come on. (<www.urban75.net>, 23 May 2005) | [W]hen he went to the **hot cross buns** the rat faced badge kisser was born. (<www.thedarkblues.co.uk>, 9 January 2016) | – Classic celtic patter let's moan about not having competition in the league whilst snapping up all the other league teams best players and sticking them on the bench. – Still above the **cheesy buns** tho. (<twitter.com>, 22 and 23 July 2018) | It's always good to see the **mouldy buns** losing, especially at home to a superior team and superior club like Celtic (<uk.answers.yahoo.com>, 30 December 2008) | I'm quite sure that St Johnstone, Motherwell, Hibs and St Mirren don't have anything like the amount of debt that the **Capri Suns** are carrying. (<www.onemickjones.com>, 13 November 2009)

There is no doubt that the compulsive coining of alternative names for the Old Firm clubs has had an influence on the development of clusters of RS nicknames, mocking or otherwise, for other teams. The age-old rivalry between the two major Edinburgh clubs, Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian, traditionally favoured by Protestants and Catholics respectively (though the times, they are certainly a-changin'; see Kelly/Bairner 2018), has proved a constant and fruitful source of such nicknames. *Hibs*, the familiar nickname for Hibernian FC, has spawned *Pen and Nibs*, *Cabbage and Ribs* (often just *the Cabbage*) and *Totties and Ribs* (from the Scots *totties* 'potatoes'), all three of which are generally affectionate.

[T]he Hearts' Faithful have discovered that the best way of countering this dissyllable is to reply "Jam Tarts! Jam Tarts!" And the Hibs, "**Pen Nibs! Pen Nibs!**" (Ritchie 1964: 121) | [T]aking Ian Cathro's side back to the Leith San Siro will be a huge boost for the **Cabbage and Ribs**. (<www.footballtransfertavern.com>, 14 February 2017) | C'mon the **totties and ribs**. (<twitter.com>, 2 February 2016)

The rhymes with *Hearts*, by contrast, are not always so benign. While its supporters may call their team the *Jam Tarts* (hence *Jambo* for a Hearts supporter) or, less commonly, the *Homer and Barts*, fans of Hibs and other rival clubs are more likely to prefer any of a number of taunting variations on the same predictable theme, including the *Wet Farts*, the *Smelly Farts*, the *Jam Farts* and the *Jam Sharts*.

Perfect day for football! Mon the **Homer and Barts!** (<twitter.com>, 4 March 2012) | But I really liked it when after Craig "self righteous" Levin, then manager of the **wet farts**, released a "home video" of the incident between BBJ & Webster. (<kerrydalestreet.co.uk>, 10 February 2005) | – Most loathed spl team (excluding the obvious). – The **smelly farts**. (<www.talkceltic.net>, 9 June 2011) | The second goal seemed to kill the game dead as a contest. Can't help think we could have put half a dozen past the **Jam Farts** today if we had wanted to. (<kerrydalestreet.co.uk>, 2 November 2008) | – Supporters of both clubs, tweet us

with your favourite memory from previous meetings between Hearts and Celtic? – Humping the **jam sharts** 7–0 at their own midden. 2013. (<twitter.com>, 7 August 2018)

(iii) THE EFFECT OF CONTEXT. It is hard to imagine that any of these pejoratives can be used self-referentially, but it sometimes happens that an originally derogatory moniker for a team comes to be reappropriated by the team's followers, thereby weakening its stigmatising intent. A prime example is to be found in the in-group use of *Front Wheel Skids* for north London's Tottenham Hotspur (popularly known as *Spurs*) via the rhyme on *Yids*, a controversial reminder of the club's popularity among Jewish immigrants from the East End in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² It is well-documented that the RS epithet *front wheel skid* is often used in British slang to denigrate Jews, as when the anarcho-punk band the Apostles sing in “Rock Against Communism” (1984), “Doesn't it make you sick? Education for our kids / Is run by four-be-tvos and front wheel skids”.¹³ However, when used by Spurs fans (both Gentiles and Jews), it takes on positive connotations and becomes a term of camaraderie (cf. Clavane 2014: 143). We can reasonably argue that this is simply a consequence of the reclaimed use of the target word *Yid* itself, but that raises the question of why *Front Wheel Skids* can be used in this way (in fact, it is also attested in the phrase *Front Wheel Skid Army* ‘the Yid Army’, the name Tottenham fans use to identify themselves),¹⁴ while its kissing cousins *Teapot Lids*, *Dustbin Lids*, *Bin Lids*, *Tin Lids* and *Saucepan Lids* normally cannot.

I hope Liverpool are leading 3–2 with 2 minutes to go and then Harry Kane scores a 40 yard screamer and then the **Front Wheel Skids** win on penalties. (<www.kumb.com>, 29 May 2019) | It's always great beating the **Teapot Lids**. (<twitter.com>, 27 February 2019) | But the worse stick i ever saw a Chelsea player get was when we had Mark Falco on loan from the **dustbin lids**. (<www.theshedend.com>, 15 October 2014) | Wolves are an exciting team to watch. They'd be far more exciting if they had actually beaten the **Bin Lids** however. (<twitter.com>, 3 November 2018) | Well done Ajax deserved win against the “**tin lids**”... (<www.the42.ie>, 30 April 2019) | Dadadadaxad we beat the fuckin yids dadadadadadada we beat the **saucepan lids** you rrrrrrr'ss. (<twitter.com>, 21 April 2012)

¹² Clavane (2012: 90) points out that, in the 1930s, about a third of the fans at a Spurs home game were Jewish.

¹³ In the unwritten xenophobe's guide to lyric writing, tautological pairs should be an absolute no-no. *Four-be-two* (or *four-by-two*) is RS for *Jew*.

¹⁴ “I'm taking my flag that says ‘Front Wheel Skid Army’” (<www.spurscommunity.co.uk>, 24 August 2009).

3.2 Personal nicknames

Names of sports stars, singers and other celebrities have been a staple of RS for nearly as long as this form of expression has been documented (see Ashley 1977). Hotten (1859), one of the foremost lexicographers of slang and the first to include a section on RS in a dictionary, lists *Jack Randle* ‘a candle’, formed on the name of bare-knuckle boxer Jack Randall. Half a century later the same denotatum came to be known as a *Harry Randall*, borrowing the name of a popular music-hall comedian of the day,¹⁵ and in the 1970s the torch (no pun intended) was passed to *Irene Handl* (Puxley 2003), namechecking the famous English actress. Footballers’ names, however, only started featuring prominently in the toolkit of coiners and users of RS in the latter part of the twentieth century, no doubt as a result of the increasing popularity of British (and more particularly English) football from the early 1990s onwards (see King 2002: 109–211; Williams 2006; Taylor 2013: 336–337). Among the numerous footballers’ names that became enshrined in RS in the closing decade of the last century are *Glenn Hoddle* ‘a doddle (i.e. a very easy task)’, *Jimmy Hill* ‘a pill’ and *Nobby Stiles* ‘piles (i.e. haemorrhoids)’ (Puxley 1992), all three of which have remained in common use to this day. The fashion has not faded one bit today, with fans revelling in innocently hilarious coinages like *Pep Guardiola*, rhyming on *Coca-Cola* (with a side-glance at the City manager’s reputation for strictly monitoring his players’ diet) and supposed aptonymic forms like *Titus Brambles*, a malicious rhyme on *shambles*.¹⁶ The following passage from Tam Cowan’s column in the *Glasgow Daily Record*, though intended as a prankish exercise in lexical tomfoolery, provides a good example of the process of deonomasticisation by which new football RS can arise:¹⁷

I was out on the Colin Nish [‘on the pish’, the Scots form of *on the piss* ‘on a drinking spree’] a few years ago and I got Bert Van Lingen [‘mingin, i.e. drunk’]. Ended up going to the Alan Hansen [‘dancin’] and it was full of wee Joe McBrides [‘rides, i.e. women seen as sex objects’] (although some of them were like Alan Hutton [‘mutton’] dressed up as Colin Cramb [‘lamb’]). One of them had long blonde Brian McClair [‘hair’] and a great Andy Roddie [‘body’]. Terrific David Beggs [‘legs’] and a cracking pair of Robert Prytz [‘tits’]. When she asked me back to her place I was like a dug with two Archie Knox [‘cocks’]. Sadly, though, I didn’t get inside her Don McVicar’s [‘knickers’]... (*Daily Record*, Glasgow, 15 December 2012)

¹⁵ “[A]fter blowing the ‘Harry Randle’ out, he jumps into ‘traitor’s head’, and is soon ‘bo-peep’” (*Evening Telegraph and Post*, Dundee, 3 August 1910).

¹⁶ “My favourite new rhyming slang I heard today.... Pep Guardiola = Coka Cola!” (<twitter.com>, 1 June 2017); “Our defence can be enough of a Titus Brambles without actually getting Titus Brambles signature” (<forum.rangersmedia.co.uk>, 20 August 2013).

¹⁷ The bracketed glosses are mine.

The unremarkable nature of this transition from name to RS contrasts with the relative rarity of the shift from RS to personal nickname. In the same way that many football notables have lent their names to RS, RS itself has rewarded some of them with a sobriquet. Five of the nicknames I have collected, *Where's the goal*, *Holy Wata*, *Monkey's Heed*, *Sweaty Balmer* and *Luca Pony*, are motivated by rhyme and semantics, each drawing upon a perceived characteristic or identifying feature of the nickname. These rhyming descriptive phrases are, in Morgan et al.'s (1979) terminology, neither exclusively “internal” nor “external” formations, but represent a perfect amalgam of both types of nicknames. Rhyme is, indeed, the main reason for the link between *Where's the goal* and the name of one-time West Ham player Carlton Cole, yet the fact that he played as a striker makes the sobriquet all the more apposite. Similarly, *Holy Wata* (often just *Holy*) for former Celtic defender Rudi Vata, is primarily based on rhyme, but the name itself is an altered, *r*-less form of the Scots *holy watter*, which says a lot about how fans regarded him during his time with the Glasgow club (1993–96).

I've a few Hammers mates. As they like a bit of rhyming slang they call him [sc. Carlton Cole] “**Where's the goal**” (www.mancityfans.net>, 16 October 2013) | [W]e had the Albanian captain at one time who amassed 59 caps and he wisnae really rated by our support although we did take to him, mibbees it's because we called him “**holy wata**”[.] (<www.celticquicknews.co.uk>, 31 August 2018)

Turning now to *Monkey's Heed*,¹⁸ the ruthless sobriquet supporters of Newcastle United came up with for Peter Reid during his time as manager of arch-rival Sunderland (1995–2002), we may fail to recognise the aptness of the phrase, but we know it was not motivated by sound alone. Before it was used as a nickname, the zoomorphic image of a monkey-headed Reid had embedded itself firmly in the collective consciousness of fans, thanks to a Newcastle chant sung to the tune of “Yellow Submarine”: “In the land where I was born / Lives a man with a monkey's heed, / And he went to Sunderland, and his name is Peter Reid. / Peter Reid's got a fuckin' monkey's heed, / A fuckin' monkey's heed, / A fuckin' monkey's heed” (see Nicholson 2011: n.pag.). Reid, as it happens, reportedly took the chant and the nickname with a sense of humour,¹⁹ thus implicitly acknowledging that, in the world of football, an embarrassing nickname is always better than no nickname at all.

¹⁸ *Heed* is a north-east dialect form of *head*.

¹⁹ According to the London *Sunday Mirror* of 26 December 1999, when he took part in the 1998 Great North Run, he wore a Sunderland shirt with a picture of a monkey's head on the back.

Having led Sunderland to two memorable wins at St James' Park and seventh place in the Premiership twice since their promotion in 1999, Reid (or "**Monkey's Heed**" as grudgingly respectful Newcastle fans routinely refer to him) has proved he is not a bad manager either. (*The Sunday Times*, London, 26 August 2001)

Sweaty Balmer and *Luca Pony* are semantically transparent for a different reason: in both nicknames one of the elements is an existing shortening of an RS word relating to a personal characteristic of the bearer. During his time at Charlton, Falkirk-born defender Stuart Balmer was affectionately known as *Sweaty Balmer*, a straightforward nickname based on the not-so-nice RS *Sweaty Sock* discussed above. The same technique, though used with an entirely different effect, accounts for *Luca Pony* as a punning moniker for Italian striker Luca Toni, surely one of the very few non-anglophone players to earn a place in the RS onomasticon. Its derogatory nature is obvious to anyone familiar with the word *pony*, an elliptical form of *pony and trap*, rhyming on *crap*.²⁰

A look at what has happened to the players in the historic opening match against Portsmouth following the return to The Valley. For example, "**Sweaty** Balmer is now a "qualified" fork lift driver. (<addicksdiary3.blogspot.com>, 5 December 2017) | They did not have the firepower to win the trophy. Striker Luca Toni – dubbed **Luca Pony** – has had a nightmare, missing chance after chance. (*The Sun*, London, 23 June 2008)

Most other appellations in my corpus are semantically opaque and can only be accounted for as motivated by rhyme. Such is the case of (*the*) *Deedle (Doddle)* for Willie Waddell, *Twists and Turns* for Tommy Burns, *Ten (Thirty)* for Bertie Auld, *Peas (and Gravy)* for Davie Weir, *Tatty (Peel)* for Neale Cooper and *Choccy (Eclair)* for Brian McClair.

George Young, the Scottish captain, has to find new names for four of his forwards, every one of whom is a Billy or a Willie. Waddell is already known as "**Deedle**". (*Daily Mirror*, London, 13 April 1950) | As they do with such favourites, the supporters awarded him an affectionate nickname – but "**Twists and Turns**", while technically accurate and descriptive of Burns' elusive style of play, was hardly their snappiest effort over the years. [...] With his distinctive shuffling gait, hard edge and penchant for gamesmanship, "**Ten Therty**" (the mis-spelling is deliberate to better illustrate pronunciation) oozed the acceptable arrogance of greatness that Murdoch had no need of. (Traynor 1999: 22, 91) | Footballers have never been overly ambitious with their nicknames (except for perhaps the complicated process which led to David Weir becoming known as "**Peas**". (*Liverpool Echo*, 1 September 2007) | **Tatty** was my nickname at Pittodrie, rhyming slang for Neale – tatty peel. (*The Sun*, London,

²⁰ The nickname was attached to him during the UEFA Euro 2008 tournament, but it lived on for some time, as evidenced in this quotation: "Most over rated striker ever – ibrahimovic, kluivert or Luca pony??" (<twitter.com>, 9 March 2011).

14 September 1998) | The one and only **Choccy Eclair**. Fantastic player. (<etims.net>, 6 February 2015)

Despite their onomastic status, these monikers are in no way different from other RS items. Their tendency to be used in shortened form surely creates a sense of intimacy with their bearers. Yet, as noted above, abbreviation is a perfectly common feature of non-onomastic RS too. What is striking at first glance is that the bulk of these nicknames refer to Scottish footballers and managers. In fact, most RS clubonyms also refer to Scottish clubs. This is no doubt a reflection of an ongoing trend in Scottish English to use home-grown RS as a marker of national identity and pride (see Lillo 2004b, 2012), a trend that has not been observed (at least to the same extent) elsewhere in the British Isles.

4 Glossary

In the glossary that follows, I have attempted to collect as large a body as possible of the RS used in football. Far from being complete or fully comprehensive (no lexicographical work really can be), the collection is modest. The vocabulary therein is limited to those things (mostly nouns) that really matter when the ball is in play: the ball itself, the field, the goal, scoring, volleys, crosses, corner kicks, etc., but there are no words for squad numbers or positions other than the goalkeeper. The glossary distinguishes those terms and nicknames entered in *DoERS* (§§ 4.1 and 4.2) from my own fresh additions (§§ 4.3 and 4.4). The latter are based chiefly on material gathered from print and online sources and are undocumented, as of this writing, in any of the dozens of slang dictionaries available to me. Many of the supporting quotations for the latter have been interspersed as illustrations in the text above.

The main criterion for inclusion of a term in this glossary is that it is directly connected with football. Most of the terms are unique to the game, but there are a few that are shared with other ball sports, such as cricket (*hedge and ditch* 'a pitch'), rugby union (*Judi Dench* 'the bench') and Australian Rules football (*sausage roll* 'a goal'). General RS terms that have been recorded in non-sporting contexts fall outside the target registers and have been excluded. This criterion has not been applied to nicknames for the simple reason that, in the context of football, they identify specific individuals, even though one and the same nickname may be used with reference to more than one personality. Take the generic nickname *Gas Meter*, for example. In the football milieu, it has been famously applied to four notable Peters, namely Peter Latchford, Peter McCloy, Peter Weir and Peter Cormack (all of whom, incidentally, have played for Scottish teams),

but not to Peter Marinello or Peter Oliver. Words that are known to have originated in football settings, but have been adopted into general usage, have also been omitted. One such is *Regi (Blinker)* ‘a stinker’, which made its first known appearance in print in November 1997 (shortly after Regi Blinker’s signing for Celtic) in reference to a terrible performance in a game of football, but has since made its way into other contexts.

Regi Blinker lived up to his cockney rhyming slang against us at Ibrox when he had a real **Regi!** (*News of the World*, London, 30 November 1997) | Daylight Robbery has the away day, the-sun-shines-outside-of-Walford feel of an Enders special. All told, a bit of a **Regi Blinker**. (*The Guardian*, London, 29 August 2008)

For the sake of consistency, I have listed only those terms and nicknames that conform to the general pattern of conventional RS. Lexicalised puns such as *Desmond Tutu* for a 2–2 scoreline and *Demba Ba* or *wine bar* for a bar (i.e. a crossbar) have not passed muster because, although they are structurally similar to RS phrases (most of them are derived from two-word proper names and are often subject to ellipsis), they are based on homophony or polysemy, not rhyme. Punned nicknames like *Charlton Pathetic* for Charlton Athletic and *Dull City* for Hull City, formed simply by replacing one of the elements of the clubonym with a word that rhymes with it, have not made the cut either. In these nicknames, the rhyme is an integral part of the wordplay (cf. Blake 2007: 80), but not its primary motivation.

Most of the items in the glossary are recorded in British usage. According to the available evidence, only two of them (*bacon butty* and *Gavin Hasting*) are regionally restricted within Britain and three (*Hugo Boss*, *Jay Leno* and *Peter Stringfellow*) are confined to Irish English. Since the nicknames listed here refer to specific individuals and clubs, they always carry with them the geographical identity of their bearers. This is not to say that they are restricted to regional use. The *Teddy Bears* (Rangers) and the *Cabbage* (Hibernian) are certainly Scottish teams, but *the Teddy Bears* and *the Cabbage* are not, or not just, the Scottish nicknames of those teams; they are the nicknames we give them wherever football is talked about.

4.1 Terms recorded in *DoERS*

Albert Hall. A ball.

A term used in various games and sports, including football. From the name of a landmark concert hall in West London. Hence *The Albert*, the

official football of the 2012 London Olympics.

Ali McGraw. To score (a goal).

From the name of American actress Ali MacGraw (b.1939).

Andy Cole. A goal.

From the name of English footballer Andy Cole (b.1971).

bass guitar. A crossbar.**beans on toast.** A goalpost.

Also **beans**.

beehive. A dive.**Bobby Moore.** To score (a goal).

From the name of English footballer Bobby Moore (1941–93).

Buddy Holly. (1) A volley.

From the stage name of American rock and roll singer Charles Holley (1936–59). Also **Buddy**. Hence **half Buddy Holly** (see § 4.3).

(2) To volley.

Casper the Friendly Ghost. A goalpost.

From the name of an animated cartoon character. Also **Casper**.

Dame Judi Dench. The bench.

From the name of English actress Dame Judi Dench (b.1934). Also **Judi Dench** and **judi**. In Irish usage the word is recorded in the context of rugby union.

Gavin Hastig. A thorough beating in a match.

It rhymes on *pasting*. Recorded in Scottish use. From Scottish rugby union player Gavin Hastings (b.1962).

hedge and ditch. A football pitch.

Also used to refer to a cricket pitch.

holy ghost. A goalpost.

In Australian usage, also recorded in the context of rugby.

Hugo Boss. A cross.

Recorded in Irish use. From Hugo Boss, a well-known German fashion house.

Jack Horner. A corner kick.

This is a specialised application of the general RS *Jack Horner* 'a corner (an angle); a street corner; a corner in a building'. From the nursery rhyme "Little Jack Horner" (1725).

Jay Leno. A penalty.

It rhymes on the slang *penno*. Recorded in Irish use. From the name of an American comedian and television host (b.1950).

Jude Law. A score.

From the name of an English actor (b.1972).

Mrs Thatcher. A matcher (i.e. an equaliser).

Rhymes on *matcher*. Based on a reference to English politician Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.

Norfolk coast. A goalpost.**Peter Stringfellow.** A yellow card.

Recorded in Irish use. From the name of an English nightclub mogul (1940–2018).

sausage roll. (1) A goal.

Also used in Australian Rules football.

(2) the hole (i.e. the area between the opponents' defence and midfield).

sausage roll keeper. A goalkeeper.

Formed on **sausage roll** (q.v.).

Steve Boulds. Moulds.

From English football player and assistant manager Steve Bould (b.1962). Also **Stevie Boulds**.

Sunday roast. A goalpost.

Also **Sunday**.

4.2 Nicknames recorded in *DoERS*

Big Peas and Gravy. Scottish footballer David “Davie” McPherson (b.1964). The adjective is a reference to his height of 6ft 3in.

Big Sherbet Dab. Scottish footballer Robert “Rab” Douglas (b.1972).

A reference to the footballer’s height: 6ft 4in. Also **Big Sherbert Dab**, **Big Sherbet** and **Big Sherbert**.

Cabbage and Ribs. Hibernian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on *Hibs*. Often reduced to *Cabbage* or *Cabbages*.

Choccy. Scottish footballer Brian McClair (b.1963).

A shortening of **Choccy Eclair** (see § 4.4).

Cock and Hens. Glentoran FC (Bel-fast).

It rhymes on the nickname *Glens*. Also **Wee Cock and Hens**.

Cream Buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Huns*.

Currant Buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Huns*. Also **Currants**.

Deedle Dawdle. Scottish football player and manager Willie Waddell (1921–92).

Also **Deedle Duddle** and **Deedle**, often with the definite article.

Earl Haigs. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the sectarian nickname *Taigs*. From Scottish Field Marshal Douglas Haig, 1st Earl Haig (1861–1928).

Front Wheel Skids. Tottenham Hotspur FC (London).

It rhymes on *Yids*. Also **Front**

Wheels and Front-Wheelers.

Gas Meter. (1) English footballer Peter Latchford (b.1952).

(2) Scottish footballer Peter Weir (b.1958).

See § 4.4.

H. English footballer David Seaman (b.1963).

From the initial letter of *Harry (Monk)*, rhyming on *spunk*, a slang synonym for *semen*, itself a homophone of *Seaman*.

Ham Shankies. Clydebank FC (Clydebank, a town near Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Bankies*.

Harry Wraggs. Partick Thistle (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Jags*. Also **Harry Rags**.

Homer and Barts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on the nickname *Hearts*. From Homer and Bart, two characters in the TV cartoon series *The Simpsons*.

Honey Pears. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It relies on the Scottish pronunciation of *Pears* as *perrs*, thus rhyming on the nickname *Gers*. Also **Honey Perris**.

Jam Farts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

A riff on **Jam Tarts** (q.v.).

Jam Tarts. (1) Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on *Hearts*. Also **Jammy Tarts**, **Jammie Tarts**, **Jambos**, **Jambo Tarts** and **Jammies**.

(2) Kelty Hearts FC (Kelty, Fife, in the east of Scotland).

Also **Jambos**.

Jimmy Krankies. Clydebank FC (Clydebank, a town near Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Bankies*. From (Wee) Jimmy Krankie, a character played by Scottish actress Janette Tough (b.1947). Also **Wee Jimmy Krankies**.

Juke Box. Scottish footballer Gordon Durie (b.1965).

A shortening of *Juke Box Jury*, a TV music programme originally broadcast on BBC One between 1959 and 1967. In some British accents *Jury* and *Durie* are homophones. Also **Jukebox** and **Juke**.

Jungle Jims. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Tims*, a shortening of **Timalloys** (q.v.). From *Jungle Jim*, an American TV series of the 1950s and its title character. Also **Jungles**.

Killiecrankies. Clydebank FC (Clydebank, a town near Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Bankies*. From *Killiecrankie*, a village in Perth and Kinross, Scotland.

Luca Pony. Italian footballer Luca Toni (b.1977).

Formed on *pony*, an elliptical form of *pony and trap*, rhyming on *crap*. The rhyme relies on an anglicised pronunciation of *Toni*.

Mickey Mousers. Liverpool FC.

It rhymes on *Scousers*, a slang synonym for *Liverpudlians*. From *Mickey Mouse*, a popular animated cartoon character created by Ub Iwerks and Walt Disney in 1928.

Monkey's Heed. English manager Peter Reid (b.1956).

Paper Hankies. Clydebank FC (Clydebank, a town near Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Bankies*. Also **Papers**.

Paris Buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Huns*.

Peas and Gravy. Scottish footballer David "Davie" Weir (b.1970).

Also **Peas**.

Pen Nibs. Hibernian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on the nickname *Hibs*.

Ruby. English footballer Darren Currie (b.1974).

This is a shortening of *Ruby Murray*, itself a common RS term for curry. From Northern Irish singer Ruby Murray (1935–96).

Screaming Alice. Crystal Palace FC (London).

Originally applied to the Crystal Palace, a former landmark of London.

Sherman Tankies. Clydebank FC (Clydebank, a town near Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Bankies*.

Shettleston Harriers. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the slur *Tarriers*. Also **Shettlestons**.

Smelly Farts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on the nickname *Hearts*.

Sticky Buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Huns*. Also **Stickies**.

Sweaty Balmer. Scottish footballer Stuart Balmer (b.1969).

The word *sweaty* is an elliptical form of the RS term *sweaty sock*, rhyming

on *Jock* ‘a Scotsman’. Coined during Balmer’s time at Charlton Athletic (1990–98). Also **Sweaty**.

String of Beads. Leeds United AFC.

Originally used to refer to the city of Leeds, in the north of England. Also **String o’ Beads** and **String a Beads**.

Teapot Lids. Tottenham Hotspur FC (London).

It rhymes on *Yids*.

Tatty Peel. Scottish midfielder Neale Cooper (1963–2018).

A nickname he was given during his time at Aberdeen (1979–86). Also **Tatty**. *Tatty peel* is the Scots form of *potato peel*.

Teddy Bears. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

A perfect rhyme on *Gers* (a common shortening of *Rangers*) in Scottish

English. Also **Teddy Berris**, **Teddies**, **Teds**, **Bears** and **Berris**.

Ten-Thirty. Scottish football player and manager Robert “Bertie” Auld (b.1938).

Also **Ten Therty** and **Ten**.

Timalloys. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *the Bhoys*. Also **Timalloys**, **Tim Malloys** and **Tims**.

Tin Pail. Vale of Clyde FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Vale*.

Watery Farts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on *Hearts*.

Wet Farts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on *Hearts*.

Where’s the goal. English footballer Carlton Cole (b.1983).

4.3 Hitherto unrecorded terms

Alan Carr. A crossbar.

From English comedian Alan Carr (b.1976).

- Nobody hit the beans on toast or the Alan Carr. (<twitter.com>, 2 March 2013)

bacon butty. Football.

A perfect rhyme on *footy* in northern English dialects, where *bacon butty* is a common expression for a bacon sandwich. Also **bacon**. The full form was reported on <www.cockneyrhymingslang.co.uk> on 19 November 2009.

- Just gonna watch the bacon today, maybe play a little Bacon too. (<www.tumbral.com>, 19 June 2011)

Betty Grable. A league table.

From the name of American actress, singer and pin-up girl Elizabeth “Betty” Grable (1916–73). See quotation in text above.

Bill and Ben. A penalty.

It rhymes on the slang *pen*. From the names of two puppets from the 1950s BBC children’s programme *The Flower Pot Men*, itself revived in the early 2000s with the title *Bill and Ben*.

- You can thank the ref for that Bill and Ben. (<community.betfair.com>, 5 December 2010)

Cinderella. A yellow card.

It rhymes on *yella*. From the title of a classic fairy tale.

- Ref forgot he was on a Cinderella. (<twitter.com>, 15 June 2014)

Dave the Rave. A save.

- What a great Dave the Rave that was! (<twitter.com>, 29 October 2017)

garden shed. A red card.

- Unbelievable. He showed Gibbs a garden shed by mistake. (<twitter.com>, 22 March 2014)

half Buddy Holly. A half-volley.

Formed on **Buddy Holly** (see § 4.1).

- – That half buddy holly to start off. – Quality!!! [...] – Quality man!! The half volley was fire. (<www.instagram.com>, 4 December 2017)

Harry Catterick. A hat-trick.

A Liverpool usage. From English football player and manager Harry Catterick (1919–85), who achieved great success during his time as manager of Everton (1961–73), one of the two major clubs in Liverpool.

- [I]f Moyes bangs Naismith up front tomorrow he will score a Harry Catterick!! (<twitter.com>, 6 January 2013)

itch and scratch. A football match.

- You watching the itch and scratch tomorrow? (Spoken, male from London, 21 November 2017)

jack tar. A crossbar.

Inspired by its earlier use as RS for 'a bar (for drinks)'. See quotation in text above.

jam rollie. A goalie.

- [H]e's popped a shot off the beans on toast past the jam rollie this is unbelievable. (<www.redandwhitekop.com>, 9 September 2009)

near and far. A crossbar.

Inspired by its earlier use as RS for 'a bar (for drinks)'. See quotation in text above.

Nicky Camball. A handball.

From Scottish broadcaster Nicky Campbell (b.1961).

- Yellow card for a deliberate Nicky Camball. (<twitter.com>, 18 January 2013)

Richie Benaud. A penalty.

It rhymes on the slang *penno*. From Australian cricketer Richie Benaud (1930–2015).

- How was this not a Richie Benaud? (<twitter.com>, 4 April 2018)

spring roll. A goal.

- What a beautiful spring roll that was! (<twitter.com>, 15 August 2018)

4.4 Hitherto unrecorded nicknames

cheesy buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the derogatory nickname *Huns*. See quotation in text above.

Choccy Eclair. Scottish footballer Brian McClair (b.1963).

Previously recorded as **Choccy** (see § 4.2). See quotation in text above.

Dundee Earl Haigs. Dundee United FC.

A sectarian nickname formed on **Earl Haigs** (see § 4.2).

- Let's hope we don't give the Dundee Earl Haigs the chance to get points towards second place to-night. (<www.urban75.net/forums>, 14 April 2010)

False Starts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on the nickname *Hearts*.

- The Hearts, The jam tarts, the false starts[.] (<www.talkceltic.net>, 29 November 2008)

Four by Twos. Tottenham Hotspur FC (London).

It rhymes on the slur *Jews*.

- [T]he four by twos have won their last 9 league matches on the bounce[.] (<www.olbg.com>, 5 May 2017)

Gas Meter. (1) Scottish footballer Peter McCloy (b.1946).

- Peter McCloy had been busy studying all the possible penalty takers in the Celtic team – Lennox, Dalglish, Hay, Deans – and had decided which way he would dive. Unfortunately, George Connelly took it – and big “Gas Meter” dived the wrong way. (*The Mirror*, Scots edition, 29 May 1999)

(2) Scottish footballer Peter Cormack (b.1946).

See § 4.2.

- “A daft wee spell”, says Cormack, who was nicknamed Gas Meter. (*The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, 3 January 2015)

Green Grapes. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the sectarian term *papes*.

- Hope he gets a few goals this year against the green grapes[.] (<www.hmfckickback.co.uk>, 4 August 2010)

Holy Wata. Albanian footballer Rudi Vata (b.1969).

It relies on an altered, *r*-less pronunciation of the Scots *watter* (variously spelt). Coined during Vata's time at Celtic (1993–96). Also **Holy Watta**, **Holy Water** and **Holy**. See quotation in text above.

hot cross buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Huns*.

- [W]hen he went to the hot cross buns the rat faced badge kisser was born. (<www.thedarkblues.co.uk>, 9 January 2016)

Iron Hoofs. West Ham United FC (London).

A jocular elaboration of *Irons*, one of the club's nicknames. Formed as a play on the RS *iron hoofs* ‘homosexual males’ (via the rhyme on *poofs*).

- Arse have been all over the Ironhoofs all game. (<cpfc.org>, 7 April 2007)

Jam Farts of Mid-Lithuania. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

An elaboration of **Jam Farts** (see § 4.2).

- Being at CP watching us lift the SPL trophy on my birthday, in the presence of the Jam Farts of Mid-Lithuania. (<twitter.com>, 7 April 2012)

JTs. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

From the initials of **Jam Tarts** (see § 4.2).

- My old boy grew up in Dalry through the 30's and 40's, and was a passionate Hearts fan till the day he passed away. He often referred to Hearts as the “JT's” or the “Jam

Tarts” (<www.hmfckickback.co.uk>, 30 August 2008)

Leather Belts. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the nickname *Celts*. Also **Leathers** and **Leather**.

- Never had the inclination to consider any other side as my team other than the leather belts. The sporting wing of a gallus tribe. Good Old Celtic. (<kerrydalestreet.co.uk>, 6 January 2008)

- MON THE LEATHERS. (<www.talk-celtic.net>, 20 August 2013)

- Off dahn the leather wiv me Dans. (<twitter.com>, 3 June 2016)

mouldy buns. Rangers FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on the derogatory nickname *the Huns*. See quotation in text above.

Scum tarts. Heart of Midlothian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on *Hearts*. This is a blend of the cruel pejorative *the Scum* and the RS name **Jam Tarts** (see § 4.2), perhaps with some reinforcement from the slang *tarts* ‘fools’.

- Bus tomorrow to see Charly and the Bhoys v the Scum tarts 6pm usual place. (<twitter.com>, 29 January 2018)

Totties and Ribs. Hibernian FC (Edinburgh).

It rhymes on the nickname *Hibs*. *Totties* is a Scots variant of the more common *tatties* ‘potatoes’. See quotation in text above.

Tuna Melts. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Celts*. From *tuna melt* ‘a tuna fish sandwich with melted cheese’.

- Mon the Tuna Melts!!!! (<twitter.com>, 21 April 2013)

Twists and Turns. Scottish football player and manager Tommy Burns (1956–2008). See quotation in text above.

Vanessa Feltz. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Celts*. From English journalist and presenter Vanessa Feltz (b.1962). See quotation in text above.

William Hagues. Celtic FC (Glasgow).

It rhymes on *Taigs*. From English Conservative politician William Hague (b.1961).

- Odds are the William Hagues will still go through but at least they’ll have to play for it. (<twitter.com>, 20 November 2012)

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