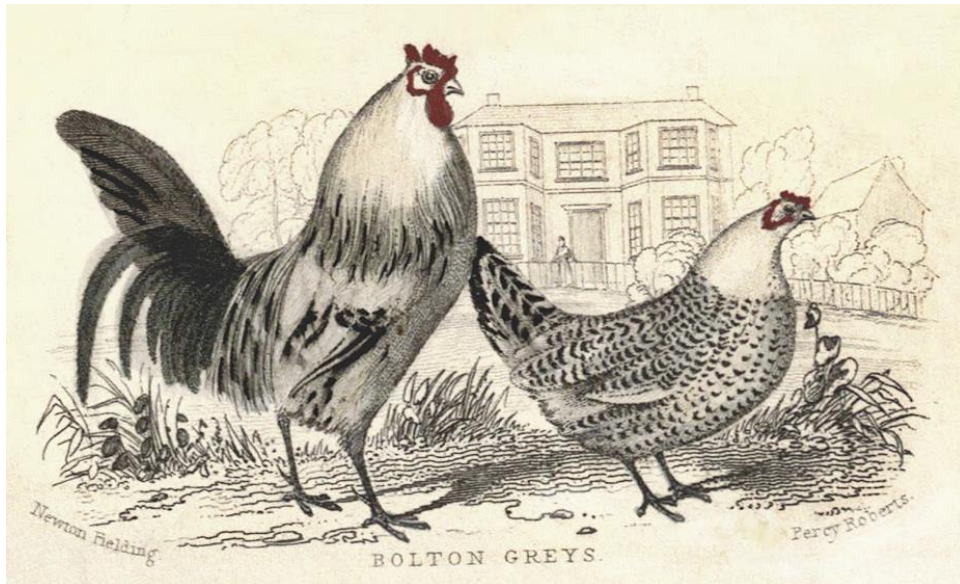


folkonwight
Island Folk History
Adapted from *Cock & Bull Stories: Animals in Isle of Wight Folklore, Dialect and Cultural History* (2008), by Alan R Phillips

COCKERELS



CLUTCHED HENS & CHICKABIDDIES

A 'biddy' or hen would be known to cackle or 'chackle', and a 'settun' was a clutch of eggs put under a hen to be hatched: the customary number was thirteen. Once sitting on the eggs it became a 'clutched hen', which could then be used figuratively: "I zay, you, our Dick's ben and vell into the sheepwash, and come home all drillen [dripping] wet. A [He] won't show to noo vittles, and a zets hunched up in chimley corner like a wold clutched hin".

'Vlux' referred to the action of an angry bird flying at and striking an intruder in order to defend her nest: "Don't goo in there, the wold hin's zetten, and she'll vlux ye if ye dooan't look out". The same idea is present with the word 'hackle', denoting the feathers on a cockbird's neck, so that when its neck feathers are raised in readiness for a fight it is 'showing hackle' – and of course the phrase also applies figuratively to humans. 'Batter' denoted the action of a fowl in dusting itself, but also seems to have had a secondary meaning of making great effort with little result, much like a fowl scraping the ground.



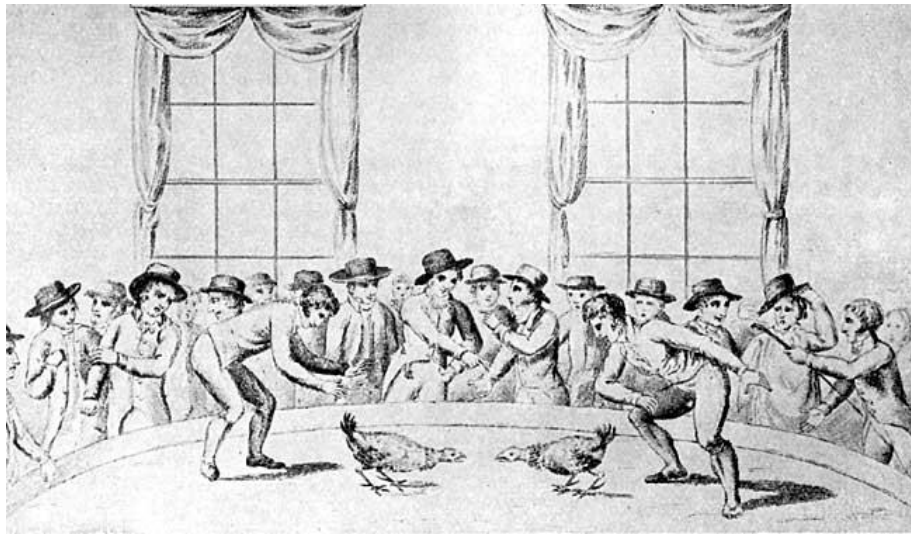
'Gallanee' was the common name for a guinea fowl; however, a 1608 will of William Haward from Brighstone contains an inventory with a reference to '4 gynnies [guinea-fowls] and 9 geese and goslins'. A 'crabbun' signified a fowl which frequented dung-hills, and by association also applied to a coward. A game-cock of the largest size had to make do with the somewhat dubious epithet of 'shakebag'.

The word 'biddy' seems to have been quite flexible in its use, indicating not only a hen but also a chick, so that 'chickabiddy' came to be used as a term of endearment for a child; both words were certainly not exclusive to the Island and have passed into the English language more widely. 'Cheeup' or 'cheerup' meant quite simply to chirp or cry like a young bird, whilst 'squab' applied not only to an unfledged bird but also by association to any thick, fat and short person. 'Rooker' was used of any birds lying close together, as well as for a bird sitting upon her eggs. 'Pip' referred to a disease in chicken. 'Snobble' was applied to the sound made by ducks voraciously devouring their food, and, believe it or not, one might once have called ducks in on a farm with 'Dill, dill!'

COCKFIGHTING

The chance survival of a handful of documents give some idea of the prevalence of cockfighting in previous centuries. We know that a licence was granted by royal prerogative for cockfighting to be held at the Castle Inn, Newport, in 1705. Then on the 12th May 1777 the *Hampshire Chronicle* gave the following announcement: "Cocking May 19th and the following two days. A main of cocks to be fought at Mr. Gregory's at the Green Dragon Inn,

Newport, between the gentlemen of the East and West Medina. To show thirty-one cocks main and ten beys for five guineas a battle and a hundred guineas the odd one".



Another document survives which was written in local dialect by a parish clerk or overseer:

"Whit Munday 1790.

A mayn of cocks to fite for three ginneys prise, the sekunt best cock to have a hat for a faver, and 8 cocks only; and nayther cock to be over four pouns and a haf, to fite in the parish of Northwood, and to meet by 10 a clock, and to way by 11, and hosoever is a mind to putt in a cock must give in there names to John Dore, and to putt down haf a crown, and hosoever is not there to time, to forfeit there haf a crown".

Cockfighting was still in full swing around 1820, and one of its patrons, Squire Thatcher of Wacklands, kept 50 game cocks. Great battles were fought in a barn at Lambsleaze, close to Hale Common, and Island cocks fought 'All-England' at Westminster; Sunday afternoon was also a favourite time for cockfighting at the nearby Fighting Cocks Inn. A cockpit in use at the Squire's Wacklands residence from the 18th century onwards also survives as a circular rose bed at the front of the house. There was once also a Fighting Cocks public house in Ryde, pulled down between 1800 and 1810; presumably so named for the same reason. And in dialect a 'soourder' referred to a gamecock that had badly wounded its antagonist.