

“You scort him up with a brick or a stone”: Some Uses of the Word *scout* in Gloucestershire and Surrounding Counties

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As a boy in a mid-Gloucestershire village in the 1960s I would help the men preparing the village cricket ground for the following Saturday’s match. If, however, I worked too enthusiastically I might be told, “Don’t scout your balls off!” When I was a little older I found the *English Dialect Dictionary (EDD)* in the town library and came across several words that might represent the “scout” – or possibly “scort” (with the /r/ pronounced, of course). Two key meanings were: “to strain with the feet as in supporting or pushing a heavy load”, and “to put a drag on a wheel”; but it was only when I came to investigate the Gloucestershire records for the Survey of English Dialects (SED) that I was able to see the wide range of forms and meanings that this word, or group of words, takes.

These words occur as responses to three questions in the Survey designed to find the words for (a) what is used to support a shaft to give a horse a rest (I.11.1), (b) what is used to prevent a cart going backwards when stopping on a hill (I.11.2) and (c) what is put underneath a wheel to stop a wagon going too fast downhill (I.11.3). Respondents in Gloucestershire gave *scout* for (a) and *scout*, *scote* and *scotch* for (b), one adding the expression *scotch en (=it) up*. *Scot* and *squat* forms occurred in other counties, while one informant in Worcestershire produced an r-coloured form, which might be rendered *scort*, in answer to the question, but added the expression *you scort him up with a brick or a stone* (i.e. put a drag under the wheel).

The English Dialect Society (EDS) Glossary for Gloucestershire (Robertson, 1890) offers the following:

SCORT or SCOTE sb.	1. The footmarks of horses, cattle etc. 2. The drag on a wheel.
SCORT or SCOTE vb.	1. To plough up the ground; of the hoofs of horses or cattle. 2. Also TO SCOT a wheel, i.e., to put the drag on.
SCOTE sb.	An ironshod staff attached to the axle of the hind wheel of a waggon to prevent it running back down hill.
SCOTE vb.	To hurry along. SCORT To scurry
SCOUT vb.	To drive away.

The *hurry / scurry* sense is supported by a quotation from Buckman: “I telled ’un to min’ as the ca’ves didn’t break away from ’un, else ’ee’d be SKORTING arl over the pleâce for ’um” (Buckman, 1890, quoted in Robertson, 1890, p. 132).

Corresponding entries in EDD are:

SCOTCH v.¹ and sb.² Var. dial. uses in Sc. and Eng.

3. To wedge firmly; to arrest from moving; to act as a drag.
6. A prop or supporter.

8. Phr. (1) *to put a scotch on*, or *to, anything*, to put difficulties in its way; (2) *to put a scotch on a person's wheel*, to check or hinder him.

SCOTE *v.* and *sb.* Lan. Wor. Hrf. Glo. Hmp. I.W. Wil. Also written *scoat* I.W.; *skote* I.W.; and in forms *scot* ne.Lan. Glo.; *skot* ne.Lan.

1. To turn up ground, as with the hoofs of horses; to scrape the ground; to scramble, slip about; to strain with the feet as in supporting or pushing a heavy load; to plough up or turn over with a spade; also with *up*. Cf. *scaut*, *scort*, *v.*¹ (Examples – not cited – are from s.Wor, Hrf, Glo and Wil.)
2. To put a drag on a wheel; to scotch a wheel. ne.Lan., Glo. (s.v. *Scort*).
3. To prop up, esp. of a rick.
4. *sb.* A drag-staff. (Examples are from s.Wor, Hrf and Glo) Glo. An ironshod staff attached to the axle of the hind wheel of a waggon to prevent it running back down hill.
5. A prop, support. ne.Lan., s.Wor., Hmp., I.W.
6. The footmarks of horses, cattle, &c. Glo.

SCORT *v.*¹ and *sb.* War. Glo. Also written *skort* Glo.

1. *v.* To plough up ground, as with the hoofs of horses or cattle, or with the wheels of a vehicle. War. Glo. Cf. *scote*, *scaut*, 2.
2. To scurry. Cf. *scoot*, *v.*¹ 3. (Buckman quotation for Glo.)
3. With *about*: to disturb, injure. War.
4. *sb.* The footmarks of horses, cattle, or deer. Glo.
5. A drag on a wheel; a wedge put under a wheel; a prop, support. Glo.

SCAUT *v.* and *sb.* Nhp. War. Wor. Shr. Hrf. Glo. Oxf. Brks. Hmp. Wil. Also written *scawt* War. w.Wor. se.Wor. s.Wor. Brks.; and in form *scaat* Oxf.

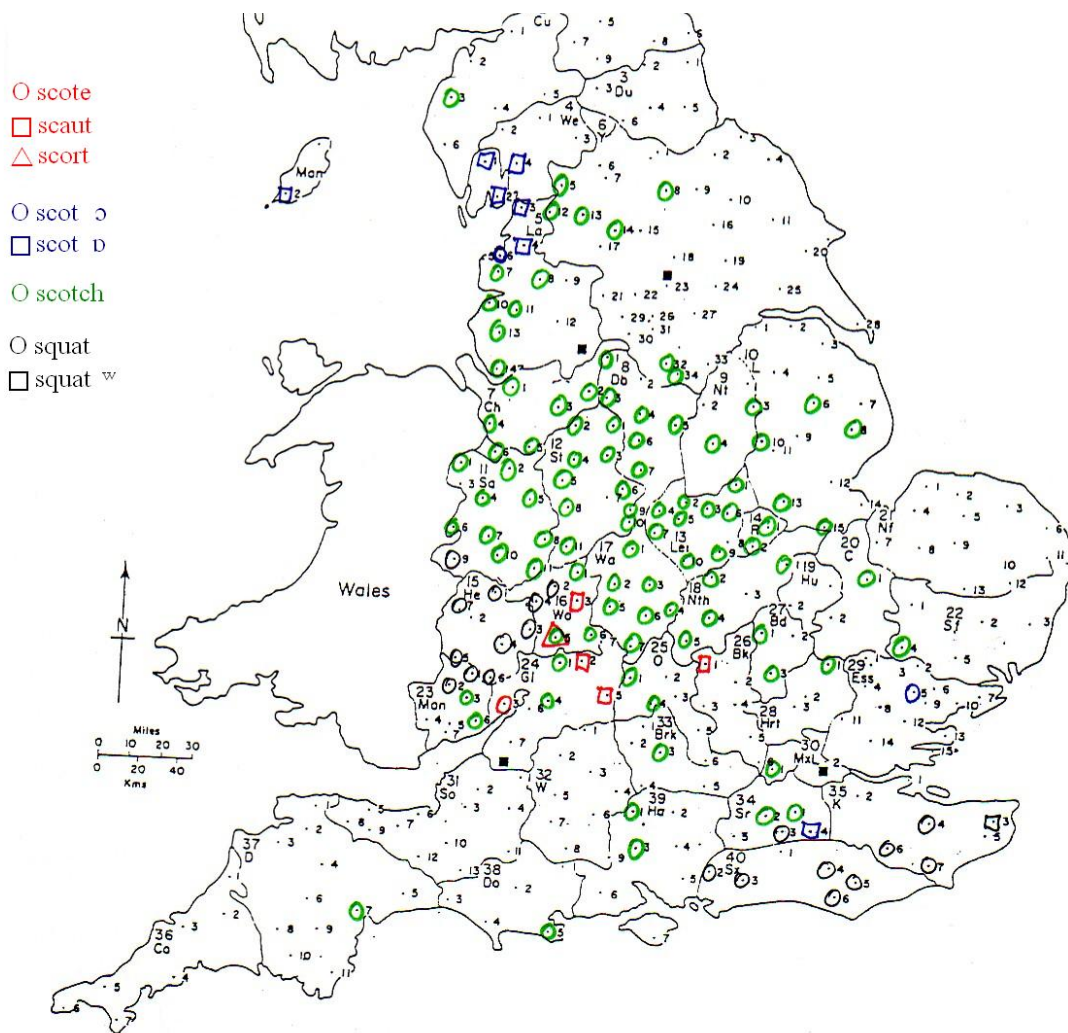
1. *v.* To strain; to push with the feet; to dig the feet into the ground in order to gain resistance; to stretch the legs out violently. Cf. *scote*. (Various examples cited, e.g. Glo. The horses strain and “scaut”, and the cart bumps over the deep ruts, Gibbs, *Cotswold Vill.* 1893)
2. To scramble; to slip; to kick, scratch, scrape with the feet; to trample the ground. Cf. *scort* *v.*¹ (Examples from Nhp, War, Wor, Glo, Oxf.)
3. With *up*: to push up, get up. Brks.
4. To place a block or stone behind the wheel of a cart when standing on a hill to prevent it slipping. se.Wor.
5. *sb.* A pole attached to the axle of a cart and let down to prevent it from running back while ascending a hill. Wor, Shr, Hrf, Hmp, Wil.

SQUAT *v.*¹, *sb.*¹, *adj.* and *adv.* Var. dial. uses in Sc. Eng. and Amer. Also written *squatt* Dev.; and in forms *squot* n.Yks. Glo. e.An. I.W. Wil. Dor. Som. Dev. Cor.; *swat* n.Cy. Cum. Wm. m.Yks. w.Yks. Lan. Der. Amer.

1. *v.* To squeeze; to crush, bruise; to flatten; to bruise or indent by letting fall; to press or push back; to strike, esp. with the open hand. Cf. *quat*, *v.*, *scat*, *v.*¹ (Examples)
2. To throw; to throw down with violence; to dash. (Examples)

3. To put a piece of wood or a stone under the wheel of a carriage to prevent its moving; *gen. in phr. to squat the wheel.* (References are s.Wor., Hrf., Glo., Ken.)
15. A wedge placed under a carriage-wheel to prevent it moving; also in *comp.* Squat-bat. (References are s.Wor., Hrf., Ken., Sur., Sus., Hmp.)

The main forms *scaut*, *scote*, *scort* and *scotch* clearly share two central meanings as noun or verb: (i) the drag on a wheel, and (ii) pushing with the feet or hoofs. *EDD* reinforces the *SED* findings, and shows that the *scote/scort/scaut* group is found primarily in Gloucestershire and the surrounding counties. *Scort* and *scaut* are so similar as to look like variant pronunciations, first of each other (with and without r-colouring of the vowel), and secondly of *scote*. These meanings are not independent, as is shown in the entry for *scaut*: pushing or straining with the feet has the effect of cutting up the ground, but also acts as a support for a heavy load, and so links into the wedge meaning, until it becomes the technical term for a drag-staff (*scotch* 3; *scote* 2, 4; *scort* 5; *scaut* 5).



The SED data showed that *scotch*-type responses were found in a broad area in the centre of England, primarily in Shropshire, Cheshire, west-Lancashire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire (see map above). *Squat* forms were clustered in two areas: Herefordshire and surrounding localities; and the South-East. The *scot* group was in the North-West, in north Lancashire and adjacent Westmoreland; while *scote/scout/scort* survived only in north Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire, plus one response in the north-west of Buckinghamshire.

Other sources provide similar findings. A survey at the North Gloucestershire village of Naunton at about the same time as the SED (Barth, 1968) found both *scout* and *scotch*: a *scout* was an “ironshod staff attached to back axle to prevent wagon from running back downhill”; a *scotch* was a “block placed before cart wheel to prevent motion downhill”, making an interesting distinction between the two terms. A source in south Gloucestershire is a taperecording of Amy Cook from Wotton-under-Edge, issued as *Cotswold Characters* (Duddridge, 1972). In the interview she describes her work on the roads and the difficulties of keeping them clear of litter: “That’s my worst piece on my area is Sinnel Lane. All the fish and chip paper is chucked up the bank and the kids is on the top of the lane scouting the bloody stones down.” The context certainly fits *EDD* definitions 2 and 3 for *scout* – “strain; push with the feet; dig the feet into the ground in order to gain resistance; stretch the legs out violently; / scramble; slip; kick, scratch, scrape with the feet”. It also has the effect of taking the *scout* area further south in Gloucestershire than was found in SED. This brings me back to the expression quoted at the start: whether the image in “Don’t scout your balls off!” derives from a friction brake on a cart or from digging the feet into the ground, it is a telling metaphor for not over-exerting oneself!

References

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