



Diana Livesey (Rose, PPE 1958) Prize

'Found'

"Confound it!" exclaimed the fusilier, on finding he had accidentally infused his delightfully balanced camomile tea with his less-well balanced book on the foundation of Rome. Fundamentally refusing to see reason he stormed to the shop and demanded a refund.

Confused?

You'd have every right to be. The above passage at first glance seems innocuous, maybe even pointless. But when we look closer we see that this passage is littered with words which all come from the same house, the same floor, the same foundations. The story of the word 'found' and its many brothers and sisters might at first seem banal and mundane, but it has a linguistic history littered with twists and somersaults, with a thousand tangential words, ranging from the financial to the exclamatory. So here's the first shocking somersault of the day: the words we will discuss in this essay, all of which stem from our eponymous hero, 'found', have absolutely nothing to do with finding things.

So what is the connection? Why are foundations the same as hedge-funds (etymologically at least) but fuse-boxes aren't the same as a profuse apology? Let's see if we can't untangle the roots.

The majority of the words that make up the English language we use today come from a family of languages, known as the Indo-European languages. There are of course exceptions to this; English borrows several loan words from other non-Indo-European languages, my favourite being *'ketchup'* (which is the Chinese word for 'the brine of pickled fish'; sounds less appetising with skinny chips now, doesn't it?), but the vast swathe of words we use come down the Indo-European route and a large proportion of these come directly from Latin; unsurprisingly, really, considering they conquered Britain in the 1st century AD. All of which brings us back to 'found', which derives from the Latin word 'fundo' meaning most commonly 'I pour' and also, rather disappointingly, 'I found or establish'. This word sparks off a whole list of English words either with the 'fund' root or the 'fuse' root (the passive participle of 'fundo' being 'fusus'). If we take a look at the passage which opened this essay we can now take a stab at explaining the roots of those words. 'Confound', for example, is in essence the same as 'confuse' (to pour/mix together - ie. Making everything unclear) making the exclamation slightly more logical; 'infused' in the context of tea-brewing makes sense too - especially if you're pouring something onto a tea-bag; then there's 'foundation' and 'fundamentally', both following exactly the same trend of something having been established or founded in the earth; and finally there's 'refusing' - a pouring back out or refutation of an idea or thing, which is exactly why what you put in your bins is called refuse - for the majority of us, things that go in bins are unwanted or rejected items.



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It is at this point, reader, that I'm sure you're ready to leap in and shout "Of course! So that explains fusilier - he is a man that pours out bullets at the enemy!" Sadly, it is at this point also, that I have to quench your enthusiasm. The word fusilier is what the French call a *faux amis*. Fusilier has nothing to do with pouring, in fact almost the opposite. While the action of 'fundo' was often used in Latin for wine, tears, water and all the other things you could conceivably pour out, the origin of fusilier stems from the Latin word for fire or fireplace - 'focus' (a useful fact to remember next time your colleague pulls up in their Ford 'Fireplace'). The etymology goes something like this. The adjectival version of 'focus' was 'focilis' which swiftly, due to the nature of linguistic change, turned into 'fosis' and then 'fusilis'. From here the English decided to coin the word 'fusil', which means 'melted' or 'molten', and a word which you can still use today (as long as you're open to mockery). Then, unsurprisingly, it came to mean the object that could propel what was effectively 'fire' at the enemy (which, interestingly, is the same reason why generals shout 'Fire!' on a battlefield), a 'fusil', which was carried by fusiliers.

In fact, the 'fuse-root' etymology problem doesn't just stop at fusilier (which is actually probably the most obscure example of the difference between 'fundo' and 'focus'). Take a look at the words 'defuse' and 'diffuse' for example. Now before you accuse the former of being some Americanised rubbish, it is worth noting that these two words do actually have different meanings, and origins, but just happen to come to the same sort of common meaning. Let's take the former, 'defuse': literally this is the removal of a fuse from a bomb, and therefore metaphorically the calming down of a situation and as you might have guessed, the fuse in a bomb comes through the *fireplace* route - that of 'focus'. But 'diffuse', is (literally) a spreading out of a poured substance (there's our 'fundo' root), perhaps better rendered into English as 'smoothing things over'. The same difference is true of refuse (a bin) and *re-fuse* (some sort of smelting activity), but what is interesting about the diffuse/defuse case is how the two words are so close in meaning having come from such different roots. But I digress - apologies for bursting your bubble about the poor fusilier - nothing to do with pouring out bullets, attractive an idea as that might seem.

"Aha!" you exclaim, undeterred by your previous attempt, "what about refund? Surely that has something to do with 'pouring back'?" Of course, this time, you're absolutely correct. A 'fund', in its strictest literal sense, is something you pour money into (in the same way as you might fund a Middle-Eastern despot, or fund a collapsing European country, to pick just two examples at random), and so refund works in very much the same way as refuse - you pour back, as it were, the unwanted item.

All of which brings us right back to the key problem with the word 'found' - that its most common association is not with trust-funds or refuse dumps, but with the word 'find', a word with which it has only one connection, and a slim one at that.



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The word 'find' has nothing to do with pouring, nothing to do with the foundations of buildings and especially nothing to do with the smelting of metal (but then as we've seen, neither does 'found'). In actual fact, the original meaning of the word 'find' was that of 'accidental discovery' - it would be the perfect word to attribute to Alexander Flemings's discovery of penicillin, for example. This is because the root of the word is tied up with the idea of 'stumbling-across-something', and therefore, finding it. To trace it back: it comes from the old Germanic word 'finden' which comes from the proto-Indo-European root of 'pent' (to walk/explore), a root from which we get the English word 'path'. So if you ever join the military and are put into a Pathfinders unit, it would be well advised not to mention that their name could justifiably be changed to the 'Pathpathers' or even worse, the 'Findfinders'. So "Where does 'found' fit into all this 'path' malarkey?" I hear you ask exasperatedly, "Something to do with pouring out paths?" Alas, no. The only actual connection that 'found' has to 'find' is that it is its perfectly regular past tense form; just as 'bind' becomes 'bound', so 'find' becomes 'found'.

So that's the story of the word 'found'. That just one word can have so many different parents and yet so many more children is a testament to the brilliance of language and of communication. It is thanks to these intricacies of language that 'word-play' exists, that we can use puns and double-entendres. And the etymology of the word 'found' is just the tip of the iceberg.

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