

12. Idioms and similes that stood the test of time

In the seventeenth century, a famous English botanist John Ray compiled and published an annotated collection of English proverbs and other idioms (1670, extended edition 1678), which includes over 1,000 items. 113 of these are still attested in current sources of the BNC2014. In the box below, you can find the original spelling of Ray's idioms and the frequency of their modern variants in the BNC2014. Out of the 113 items, 67 are listed with the frequency of four and above.

<i>Ray's (1678) English proverbs</i>	<i>Frequency in the BNC2014</i>	<i>Frequency per million</i>
To make both ends meet	145	1.42
Tis sooner said then done	97	0.95
Every thing is the worse for wearing	63	0.62
To shoot wide of the mark	54	0.53
To have his hands full	48	0.47
He hes hit the nail on the head	43	0.42
To break the ice	38	0.37
Better late then [sic] never	37	0.36
Marriages are made in heaven	34	0.33
Just like a shadow	31	0.30
To run through thick and thin	30	0.29
He's on his last legs	25	0.24
To turn over a new leaf	24	0.23
No more like then chalk and cheese	24	0.23
To follow one's nose	22	0.22
To add fewell [fuel] to the fire	21	0.21
To kill two birds with one shaft [or stone]	19	0.19
It's the nature o' th' beast	19	0.19
Live and let live	18	0.18
To leave one i'th' lurch	18	0.18
Tooth and nail	18	0.18
Out of sight out of mind	17	0.17
A chip of the old block	17	0.17
To clip one's wings	17	0.17
To eat ones [sic] words	17	0.17
Sike father, sike son, &c. [Scottish: like father, like son]	16	0.16
He is heart of oak	16	0.16
I smell a rat	15	0.15
To have the Law in ones [sic] own hand	15	0.15
All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy	14	0.14
To set the best foot forward	14	0.14
You cannot see wood for trees	13	0.13
I have other fish to fry	12	0.12
One may live and learn	12	0.12

<i>Ray's (1678) English proverbs</i>	<i>Frequency in the BNC2014</i>	<i>Frequency per million</i>
Without pains no gains	12	0.12
Look not a gift horse in the mouth	11	0.11
To run the wild goose chase	11	0.11
Beggars must be no choosers	11	0.11
To take a hair of the same dog	10	0.10
I'll not buy a pig in a poke	10	0.10
By hook or by crook	9	0.09
To call a spade a spade	9	0.09
One bird i'th' hand is worth two in the bush	9	0.09
Nothing venture nothing have	9	0.09
Charity begins at home	8	0.08
Hobsons [sic] choice	8	0.08
On the other side	8	0.08
A friend in need is a friend indeed	7	0.07
To set the cart before the horse	7	0.07
Rome was not built in one day	7	0.07
Make hay while the sun shines	6	0.06
To put one's nose out of joint	6	0.06
Too much familiarity breeds contempt	6	0.06
To build castles in the air	6	0.06
To be at daggers drawing	6	0.06
There is na fool to an auld fool	6	0.06
Seeing is believing	5	0.05
As fit as a fiddle	5	0.05
To live from hand to mouth	5	0.05
When the cat is away, the mice play	5	0.05
As plain as the nose on a man's face	5	0.05
To kill with kindness	5	0.05
To rob Peter to pay Paul	4	0.04
What? keep a dog and bark my self [sic]	4	0.04
Count not your chickens before they be hatch't	4	0.04
Little said soon amended	4	0.04
As demure as if butter would not melt in's mouth	4	0.04