

At Loggerheads

In William Shakespeare's 1594 play *Love's Labor's Lost*, the character Biron, a young lord, cries to Costard, a clown, "Ah, you whoreson logger-head, you were born to do me shame."

In Shakespeare's day, the word *logger-head* was an insulting epithet meaning 'thick-headed, stupid person,' coming from the English dialectal word *logger*, meaning 'heavy chunk of wood.' The nickname *logger-head* in Shakespeare's time might be considered roughly analogous to our modern insult *block-head*.

Some authorities suggest Shakespeare's logger-head is the progenitor of the later expression *to be at loggerheads*, or engaged in a quarrel or a dispute, especially between two thick-headed individuals (or logger-heads) with a penchant for endless, insoluble arguments.

But wait, say other sources, not so fast, because another type of *loggerhead* of bygone centuries was a long-handled iron instrument with a bulb at one end, that when heated, was used to melt pitch or tar, or to heat liquid, most commonly, a drink called 'flip,' a beverage of sweetened spice liquor and beaten eggs. Such loggerheads, though utility devices would be dangerous weapons in the hands of combatants, especially those who had consumed too much flip. Some etymologists believe the phrase *to be at loggerheads* was inspired by the iron devices used to melt pitch and heat liquids.