

## ZERO REDUNDANCY!

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In the February 2020 Word Ways (volume 53, number 1) the article **0.1479% Redundancy** presented a list of words and names beginning with 675 of the 676 possible two-letter combinations, or digraphs. The missing digraph was VQ. The author appealed for readers to find a word or name beginning with those two elusive letters. I managed to find a name beginning with those letters. Because it is so obscure, I will provide a fair amount of detail below.

First off, as the author noted, there are no main entries in *the Oxford English Dictionary* beginning with VQ. However, a search of the entire text of the OED reveals two Old Danish words (**vqvæm**, **vquem**) beginning VQ – these appear in the entry for **UNQUEME**, an obsolete word meaning ‘displeasing, disagreeable, unacceptable’. But Old Danish words hardly satisfy the need for a proper VQ word.

Another dictionary useful for finding strange words is the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL), findable online at [dsl.ac.uk](http://dsl.ac.uk). DSL brings together the two major historical dictionaries of the Scots language: *The Scottish National Dictionary* (containing words from modern Scots, defined as 1700 onwards) and *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (containing words from Older Scots, defined as 12<sup>th</sup> century to 1700).

As well as allowing for searches of main entries, the DSL allows for searches of the entire text, including the use of wildcard characters. In this instance, I simply searched the entire text for the string VQ\*. My search came up with the following entry at the head word **PENNY-LAND** (I have removed quotes which are of no relevance to the VQ search):

**Penny-land**, *n.* Also: **pen(n)ie-**, **pen(n)ey-**, **pen(n)e-**, **peny-** and **-lande**. [Cf. ME. *penilond* ? land paying a penny rent per annum (*a* 1300); the corresp. med. L. term is *denariata*.]

1. A division of land, of variable size, which formerly paid a tax of one silver penny to an overlord, ? orig. the Norwegian King. Cf. also *halfpenny-land* Halfpenny *n.* b and *farding land* Farding *n.*

2. Following a cardinal number other than 1, chiefly without inflexion: cf. Penny *n.* 7. **a.** In Orkney and Caithness and earlier in Shetland, equal to of an Urisland, appar. reckoning 18 English pennies to the Norwegian ounce. See esp. Capt. F. W. L. Thomas ‘What is a Pennyland’ in *Soc. Ant.* XVIII. 253 f., esp. 258–60, and Hugh Marwick *Orkney Farm-Names* (Kirkwall. 1952) 191 f., esp. 210. Also abbreviated as *d. land* or *d. terre*, and in the macaronic form *pennie terre*.

[various quotes removed]

1614 *Ib.* 148.

Ane penny half d. land callit **Vquever**;

[various quotes removed]

Notice that word **VQUEVER** taken from a quote dated 1614. By clicking on the “lb. 148” characters, the DSL bibliography indicates that the quote comes from this source:

*Rentals of the Ancient Earldom and Bishoprick of Orkney*, edited by Alexander Peterkin, published in Edinburgh, 1820

So, what is **VQUEVER**? I suspected it was the name of a piece of land, perhaps a rented farm, in the Orkney islands, Scotland.

Following on from the DSL search, I did a Google search for **VQUEVER**. The entire contents of the 1820 work quoted above, *Rentals of the Ancient Earldom and Bishoprick of Orkney*, can be found in books.google.co.uk. **VQUEVER** appears in three places in this old tome, on pages 26, 30 and 148. It seems to be the name of a farm, and is listed along with the names of many other farms and pieces of land on which rents were charged. Examples of other strange farm names from the same book are GIRSQUOY, KIRBUSTER, QUHYTTCLETT, QUOYIS, SHALTAQUOY, SKEANNESTOFT and VCHILSETTER.

All 676 initial digraphs have now been conquered, justifying the title of this short article ZERO REDUNDANCY!, a title first used for an item in Dmitri Borgmann’s 1967 book *Beyond Language*. Borgmann’s target for his item was zero redundancy, but he didn’t actually achieve it. I’m sure he’d be pleased that the target has finally been reached.