Despite the promise of the title, this article is not concerned with the intelligibility of dictionary words without vowels (that is, with the letters AEIOUY removed), but instead with that tiny group of words which contain no vowels at all. For the sake of completeness, we include a considerably larger group of words which appear vowelless, but in reality are not -- words which use the letters V or W to represent vowel sounds. On the other hand, we do not include two burgeoning classes of vowelless words quite familiar to the average reader -- abbreviations such as MR., MRS. or DR. which are pronounced as if the full word were present, and acronymic words such as TV, DDT, MPH or TNT, usually printed in capitals and invariably pronounced by spelling out the individual letters. A crossword puzzle using all these types of vowelless words (of three letters only) was presented by Darryl Francis in the August 1975 Word Ways.

Our examples are drawn from two sources, the Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam-Webster Unabridged (Second and Third Editions). We do not claim completeness, but feel that we have located most of the examples in boldface type, together with occasional textual examples. Additions are welcome, as well as extensions to other dictionaries.

Perhaps the commonest class of vowelless words are interjections which onomatopoeically represent various sounds -- usually human-produced, but occasionally by animals or inanimate objects.

**BRRR** a sound of shivering

**GRR** sound of a dog

**HM H’M** expression of assent

**HSH** hush

**PST** to attract attention, or enjoin silence

**SH** hush

**ST** silence, quiet

**TCH** vexation and disgust

**TCK** surprise and displeasure

**TPRW** imitation of the sound of a horn

**TST** hissed sound enjoining silence

Of these, BRRR and TPRW are found only in the OED (the latter in a quotation from 1430). The difficulty with onomatopoeic words is in accurately reproducing them on paper. Even in "Hark the herald angels sing" can be reproduced, but the OED has "shshshshsh", so it is probably incorrect to include. In addition, many "W" words are spelled "V" with and without accent marks.

Are there any examples of contractions which are vowelless?

Nearly all "W" words are spelled "V" with and without accent marks.

**CWM** /'kəm/ (1818)

**CRWTH** /kə'rθ/ (1859)

These are found in the OED. V is used here. Examples include:

**BRWK** 6v (1876)

**CRWD, CRWTH** (1817)

**DRW** 5v (1859)

**FRW** 65v (1876)

**FLW** 5v (1859)

**GRW** 5v (1859)

**HV 3v** howl

**HWR** 6v (1876)

**MV** 5v mew

**MWNK** 6v (1876)

**MWTHT** (1876)

**NV, 2-3v** nay

**PLWCH** 6v (1876)
curately representing the underlying sound; as Maxey Brooke showed in "Hark the Bark!" in the February 1975 Word Ways, the same sound can be represented in substantially different ways by different nationalities. Even within a nationality, variation is encountered; for example, the OED has under SH illustrative quotations spelling it s-s-sh, 'sh, shshsh, sh-sh-sh, and s-s-s-s-s-sh. Readers of comic strips encounter a far wider variety of idiosyncratic spellings of sounds.

A second class of vowelless words is represented by contractions, usually (but not always) written with an apostrophe. The following list, probably incomplete, is taken from the OED and Webster's Second.

- CH pronoun, an aphetic form of ich
- 'LD colloquial contraction for would or should
- 'LL colloquial contraction of will
- N'T NT colloquial contraction of not
- 'RT contraction of art
- 'SH' elision of she, as in sh'as (she has)
- 'ST contraction of hast
- TH'TH' contraction of the

In addition, Webster’s Third explicitly lists all the letter plurals, both with and without apostrophes (BS, B'S).

Are there any no-vowel words that are neither onomatopoeic nor contractions? We know of only one: NTH, found in both Webster's and the OED.

Nearly all of the apparently vowelless words -- those that use V or W to represent vowel sounds -- date back several centuries; the only modern examples we know of are:

- CWM /köom/, a Welsh word meaning 'cirque'
- CRWTH /krooth/, a variant of 'crowd', a Celtic stringed instrument

These are found in both Webster's and the OED. The other examples are purely OED, and are given below with their century of citation (minus 10). V is an abbreviation for 'variant of'.

- BRWK 5v brook; BWRCH 5v burgh
- CRWD, CRWTH v crowd (Welsh fiddle); CWM cirque
- DW 5v drew; DRWN 5-6Scv drown; DW 6Scv do; DWK 5v duke
- DRW 6Scv door
- FLW 5v flue (fishing-net); FRWT 6Scv fruit
- GRW 5v grow
- HV 3v how; HVNT MEv hunt; HW 3-4v how; HWTN 4Scv hunt;
  HWR 6v whore; HWS 6Scv house; HWSZ 6Scv house
- MV v mew (in 1440 quote); MWF 5v move; MWK 6Scv muck;
  MWNK 6Scv monk; MWR 4-5Scv moor; MWT 3-6Scv moot;
  MWTHT 6Scv mouth
- NW 2-3v now; NW 4v now; NWN 5Scv nun
- PLWCH 6Scv plough; PRW 3-4v prow (profit); PWF 6Scv puff,
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