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arse, *n.*

Forms: OE *ærs*, *ears*, OE–16 *ars*, ME *ers*(**e**, **eeres**, **arce**, ME **nes**-, ME–18 **arse**.

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: Common Germanic: compare Old High German, Old Norse, Danish, Swedish *ars*, Old Frisian *ers*, German *arsch*, Old Germanic **ars-oz*, cognate with Greek *ἄρρος*, **ῥρος*.

Obs. in polite use.

1.

a. The fundament, buttocks, posteriors, or rump of an animal.

c1000 ÆLFRIC *Gloss.* in Wright 44/2 *Nates*, ears-lyre.

1377 LANGLAND *Piers Plowman* B. v. 175 Baleised on þe bare ers [*v.r.* *ars*], and no breche bitwene.

†a1398 J. TREVISA tr. Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (BL Add. 27944) (1975) I. vii. liv. 407 Emoroydes beþ five veynes þat strech out attip þe ers.

1480 CAXTON *Chron. Eng.* ccxxvi. 233 They lete hange fox tailles..to hele and hyde her arses.

1547 A. BORDE *Breuiary of Helthe* i. f. xviii The 25. Capytle doth shewe of a mannes ars.

1663 S. BUTLER *Hudibras: First Pt.* i. iii. 236 Then mounted both upon their Horses, But with their faces to the Arses.

1704 SWIFT *Full Acct. Battel between Bks.* in *Tale of Tub* 244 Do you think I have nothing else to do..but to Mend and Repair after your Arse? [*i.e.* behind you, in your rear.]

b. in phr. **heavy arse:** a lazy fellow, a lie-a-bed. **to hang the arse:** to hold back, be reluctant or tardy. **arse upwards:** in good luck. **arse over tip (or tit),** head over heels; also *fig.*

1530 J. PALSGRAVE *Lesclarcissement* 436/2 What up, heavy arse, cannest thou nat aryse.

c1600 *Timon* (1980) i. v. 19 This man this daye rose with his Arse upwards To daye a fidler and at night a Noble.

1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* *Fesse-cul*, A Pedanticall whip-arse.

a1640 P. MASSINGER *Guardian* v. iv. 94 in *3 New Playes* (1655) Nay, No hanging an arse.

1663 S. BUTLER *Hudibras: First Pt.* i. i. 35 Could he stir To active trot one side of's Horse, The other would not hang an-Arse.

1922 J. JOYCE *Ulysses* II. xv. [Circe] 445 Arse over tip. Hundred shillings to five.

1932 W. S. MAUGHAM *Narrow Corner* xi. 73 I'm pretty nimble on me feet, but I nearly come arse over tip two or three times.

1968 A. DIMENT *Great Spy Race* x. 184 I scrambled down a sharp bank..almost going arse over tit when my foot caught in a branch.

1972 *Observer* 24 Sept. 37/3 An alternative system which..turns Marx arse over tip.

- 1974 P. TINNISWOOD *Except you're a Bird* xi. 69 He'll have me out of the job as soon as look at me. It'll be an arse over tit job in double quick time.

c. *not to know one's arse from one's elbow* (and similar phrases): a coarse expression suggestive of complete ignorance or innocence.

- 1930 R. BLAKER *Medal without Bar* xiii. 69 'But nor 'an 'un' (this phrase was his masterpiece of thoughtful emphasis), 'nor 'an 'un of us knows 'is ears from 'is elbow when it comes to learning —learning like you orficers have got up your sleeves.'
- 1944 'N. SHUTE' *Pastoral* iv. 75 I wish I'd had a crowd like that for my first crew. We none of us knew arse from elbow when they pushed me off.
- 1966 'L. LANE' *ABZ of Scouse* 29 Don't know Thairsday from brekfuss-time.
- 1966 'L. LANE' *ABZ of Scouse* 29 Don't know 'is arse from 'is elbow.
- 1986 S. PENMAN *Here be Dragons* i. v. 75 But what Norman ever heeded Saxon advice? He does not know his arse from his elbow when it comes to fighting the Welsh.
- 1996 F. MCCOURT *Angela's Ashes* (1997) iv. 129 He says, I'll tell you more when you grow up, Frankie. You're too young now and you don't know your arse from your elbow.

2. *transf.* or *fig.* The bottom; the lower or hinder end; the fag end, tail.

- c1400 *Rom. Rose* 7580 Thou shalt for this sinne dwelle Right in the divels arse of helle.
- 1556 in J. G. Nichols *Chron. Grey Friars* (1852) 73 Whyppyd..at the carttes arse..for vacobondes.
- 1622 T. DEKKER & P. MASSINGER *Virgin Martir* II. sig. E4^v The arse, as it were, or fag end of the world.
- 1742 W. ELLIS *Mod. Husbandman* Aug. v. 11 [Lay the sheaves] in a sloping Posture, close together with their Arses outward.
- 1880 [see *arse-end n.* at Compounds 1a].

COMPOUNDS

C1. General *attrib.*

a.

arse-end *n.*

- 1880 R. HOLLAND in *O. Farming Words* 2 In Cheshire the stalk-end of a potato [is called] the 'arse-end of a 'tater.'
- 1958 P. SCOTT *Mark of Warrior* 1. 52 We *are* out of date. We get the arse-end of any new equipment that's going.

b. Also spec.

arse-end Charlie *n.* (See quot. 1942.)

1942 R. HILLARY *Last Enemy* 132 I was shot down acting as Arse-end Charlie to a Squadron of Hurricanes. Arse-end Charlie is the man who weaves backwards and forwards above and behind the Squadron to protect them from attack from the rear.

c.**arse-hole** *n.*

a1400 in Wright *Voc.* 183 Arce-hoole, *podex*.

1930 E. POUND *Draft of XXX Cantos* xiv. 61 Faces smeared on their rumps... Addressing crowds through their arse-holes.

1948 *Landfall* 2 178 It's absolute comfort from arse-hole to breakfast-table.

1950 D. THOMAS *Let.* 17 July in *Sel. Lett.* (1966) 350 This arsehole of the universe..this..fond sad Wales.

arse-tharme *n.*

c1450 in Wright *Voc.* 186/2 *Cirbus*, *harstharme*.

?a1500 *Nominale* (Yale Beinecke 594) in T. Wright & R. P. Wülcker *Anglo-Saxon & Old Eng. Vocab.* (1884) I. 751 *Hoc intestinum, hic colus, nestarme*.

arse-therl *n.*

c1000 ÆLFRIC in Wright *Voc.* 44/2 *Anus vel verpus*, ears þerl.

arse-winning *n.*

1393 LANGLAND *Piers Plowman* C. VII. 306 An hore of hure ers~wynninge · may hardiloker tythe.

arse-wisp *n.*

1440 *Promptorium Parvulorum* Arswyspe, *Maniperium*, *anitergium*.

C2. Also ARSEFOOT *n.*, ARSELING(S *adv.*, ARSESMART *n.*, ARSEWARD *adv.* and *adj.*, q.v.

arse-board *n.* (still *dial.*) the tail board of a cart.

arse-gut *n.* the rectum, also *fig.*

- 1599 A. M. tr. O. Gaebelkhover *Bk. Physicke* 139/2 For the comminge out of the Arsegutte.
 1667 R. L'ESTRANGE tr. F. G. de Quevedo y Villegas *Visions* ii. 66 The very Arse-gut, the Drain and Sink of Monarchies.

arse-licking *n.* and *adj.* toadying.

- 1912 D. H. LAWRENCE in F. Lawrence *Memoirs* (1961) 189 [Written in D. H. L.'s hand over a flattering letter] Arse-licking.
 1958 P. SCOTT *Mark of Warrior* i. 30 I can't go up and say Were you my brother's C.O.?..it'd look like arse-licking.
 1960 F. RAPHAEL *Limits of Love* i. ix. 116 The new fighting Yid still squeals like the old arse-licking kind.

arse-long *adv.* (cf. *SIDELONG adv.*¹)

- 1540 R. JONAS tr. E. Roesslin *Byrth of Mankynde* i. f. xv When it [sc. the foetus] procedeth..sydelong, arselonge, or backelonge.

arse-push *n.* a heavy backward fall.

- 1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* *Culant*, giuing an arse-posse vnto.
 1660 J. HOWELL *Lex. Tetraglotton* Arsepush.

arse-ropes *n.* intestines.

- 1382 *Bible* (Wycliffite, E.V.) 1 Sam. v. 9 The arsroppis of hem goynge out stonken.

DRAFT ADDITIONS SEPTEMBER 2008

Brit. slang.

a. to disappear (also go, vanish, etc.) up one's own arse: to become excessively self-involved, pretentious, or conceited.

- 1966 P. MARSHALL *Excluded from Cemetery* ii.iii. 181 You see, logic cannot stand the application of logic. Under such an application, logic will disappear up its own arse.
 1972 *Art & Artists* Apr. 27/2 For Ben, art must be synonymous with truth if it is to resolve its tendency to fly up its own arse.
 1978 *Sounds* 11 Feb. 16/1 The self-serious artistic and socio-political statements of the Woodstock Generation? Oh dear. They vanished up their own arses, alright.

- 1998 *Touch* July 109/1 It's the kind of place that manages to revel in a bit of pretentious comfort without going too far up its own arse.
- 2008 *New Musical Express* (Nexis) 31 May Oasis have disappeared up their own arse. They think they are Led Zeppelin.

b. to be up one's own arse and variants: to be self-involved, pretentious, or conceited.

- 1988 *Marketing* 8 Sept. 9 A friend of mine, who didn't like them, described them as 'stuck up their own arse'.
- 1997 G. WILLIAMS *Diamond Geezers* xxviii. 170 Sanctimonious cowards, too up their own arses to feel pity for their victims.
- 2004 *Face* Apr. 116/2 John is very tall, very smiley and not remotely up his own arse, considering he was the most fancied man on the planet.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

slang (chiefly *Brit.* and *Irish English*). **my arse!**: (expressing dismissive or incredulous contradiction, esp. as a scornful rejection of another's stated opinions) 'nonsense!', 'like hell!', 'you must be joking!' Usually after specifying word or phrase. Cf. *my foot!* at FOOT *n.* 1g.

- [1602 B. JONSON *Poetaster* IV. vii *Cris.* They say, he's valiant. *Tucc.* Valiant? so is mine arse.]
- 1933 M. LOWRY *Ultramarine* vi. 236 'Got icebreakers on them.' 'Icebreakers my arse.'
- 1947 P. GREER in *Penguin New Writing* XXIX. 26 'Youns a lot of cod, anyway. Gentleman farmer me arse,' he said sarcastically.
- 1981 D. WILCOX & E. RANTZEN *Kill Chocolate Biscuit* viii. 137 'I think we should both be pleased that she's made this friendly gesture—even if it is a little eccentric.' 'Eccentric my arse,' he said, shocking me into silence.
- 1999 C. AHERNE et al. *Royle Family Scripts: Ser. 2* (2000) Episode 7 160 *Barbara.* Let's all have a snowball! Don't snowballs make your feel Christmassy, ey? *Jim.* Snowballs my arse. It's a bloody swizz this Christmas lark.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

slang (orig. and chiefly *Brit.*). **arse about face**: (*a*) *adj.* contrary to what is usual, expected, or logical; perverse; (*b*) *adv.* in completely the

wrong order or manner; back to front. Cf. ARSY-VERSY *adv.* and *adj.*, ASS-BACKWARDS *adv.* and *adj.*

- 1946 R. GRINSTEAD *They dug Hole* II. i. 70 That's the army all over, arse about face.
- 1973 I. COCHRANE *Streak of Madness* 53 He always got his words arse about face. He said to Da one morning: 'I put my foot in the horn as the trousers blew eight.'
- 1983 J. SULLIVAN *Only Fools & Horses* (1999) I. 3rd Ser. Episode 5. 170/2 All I asked you to do was to put the box of wine in the fridge and me tub of neapolitan ice-cream in the freezer. But no, you get that arse about face, don't you?
- 2001 *Austral. Financial Rev.* (Nexis) 9 Mar. 28 Most people think technology, then processes, then people. That's arse about face. People is where it starts and stops.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

Brit. and Irish English slang.

a. to — **one's arse off**: to — intensely, vigorously, or to excess.

Freq. in **to work (etc.) one's arse off**: to work extremely hard. Cf. ASS *n.*² 3b.

With quot. 1923, cf. *tear-arse n.* at TEAR- *comb. form* 2.

- 1923 J. MANCHON *Le Slang* 54 *To tear one's arse off*, s'échiner à travailler.
- 1981 F. LAKER in *Forbes* (Nexis) 3 Aug. 34 If I don't work my arse off all the time, the dividend drops, the value of the shares goes down and that puts mine down.
- 1988 C. WALLACE-CRABBE *I'm deadly Serious* 16 You wake on your sodden pillow..then shiver your arse off.
- 1992 P. MCCABE *Butcher Boy* (1993) 138 I went away laughing my arse off.
- 1994 *Face* Sept. 157/2 90 per cent of clubbers go to clubs to cop off, dance their arses off and get out of their head.
- 2000 *Courier* (Aberystwyth Univ. Students' Union) 22 Feb. 25/1 Great I'm gonna be away from home for two months working my arse off in different towns.

b. to — **the arse off someone**: to — someone vigorously, intensely, or to an extreme degree. Freq. with reference to sexual intercourse.

- 1968 G. M. WILLIAMS *From Scenes like These* vi. 130 For a while it had been enough just to know he was banging the arse off a toff's daughter.
- 1971 F. FORSYTH *Day of Jackal* xx. 336 We're looking for a fellow who screwed the arse off a Baroness..not a couple of raving nances.
- 1989 M. DARKE *First of Midnight* (BNC) 67 It's enough to freeze the arse off a cat.
- 1994 *Guardian* 30 Mar. II. 8/4 It would bore the arse off anybody, it's real anorak stuff.

2002 *Sunday Mirror* (Electronic ed.) 14 July Her admission that she 'fancied the arse off' the male model.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

Brit. slang. A stupid, unpleasant, or contemptible person; a fool.

The use in quot. c1784-5 is of a form deleted in the original manuscript, recorded by the editor, G. Keynes.

- [c1784-5 W. BLAKE *Island in Moon* ii, in *Compl. Writings* (1972) 46 If I have not presented you with every character in the piece, call me (Ass* Arse *del.*) Ass.]
- 1968 E. LOVELACE *Schoolmaster* xii. 191 Look, boy, don't play the arse, you hear.
- 1986 C. PHILLIPS *State of Independence* 139 A couple of stupid arses on motor bikes.
- 1990 *Record Mirror* 3 Feb. 16/3 All manic fretwork and Bolshie beats, it guarantees you making an arse of yourself on the dancefloor.
- 2000 N. GRIFFITHS *Grits* (2001) 38 A didunt fancy er eetha—fuck no, scraggy old boot, witchy, sour-face—this was more, like, revenge on Browntree cos ee's an arse.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

Brit. slang. Expressing frustration, regret, or annoyance: 'oh no!' 'damn!'.

- 1994 *Re: Absolutely* in *alt.comedy.british* (Usenet newsgroup) 2 May And I missed it? Oh arse!
- 1996 C. BROOKMYRE *Quite Ugly One Morning* xxx. 195 He felt something cold and metallic pressed into the back of his head. Arse, he thought. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.
- 2001 *Games Master* Mar. 103/4 (*caption*) Arse! My iron undercrackers have rusted up again.

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2002

arse bandit *n. slang* (derogatory and offensive orig. *Brit.*) a homosexual man.

- 1961 E. PARTRIDGE *Dict. Slang* Suppl. 983 *Arse bandit*, synonym for arse king [*sc.* a notorious sodomite].
- 1966 G. M. WILLIAMS *Camp* x. 152 A lot of poncey old arse-bandits.
- 2001 *Daily Tel. (Sydney)* (Nexis) 15 Mar. T4 I don't have a problem with homosexuals, one of my best friends is an arse bandit.
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