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busy, *adj.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /'bɪzi/, U.S. /'bɪzi/

Forms:

α. OE **bisig**, OE **bysig**, OE **bysigige** (plural, transmission error), OE–15 **bisy**, eME **bisegæste** (superlative), eME **bisegere** (comparative), eME **bisegure** (comparative), eME **bisgre** (comparative), ME **bisaie**, ME **bise**, ME **bisi**₃, ME **bissy**, ME **bisye**, ME **byse**, ME **bysi**, ME **byssy**, ME–15 **bisi**, ME–15 **bisie**, ME–15 **bysie**, ME–15 **bysy**, ME–15 **bysye**; *Sc.* pre-17 **bisie**, pre-17 **bisse**, pre-17 **bissie**, pre-17 **bissy**, pre-17 **bisy**, pre-17 **bysse**, pre-17 **byssy**, 17–18 **bizzie**, 17– **bizzy**.

β. ME–15 **buysy**, ME–16 **busi**, ME–16 **busye**, ME–17 **busie**, ME– **busy**, 15 **buisye**, 15–16 **buysie**, 15–17 **buisie**, 15–17 **buisy**, 16 **buissy**, 16 **bussy**; *Sc.* pre-17 **buisie**, pre-17 **busie**, pre-17 **bussie**, pre-17 **bussy**, pre-17 **busy**.

γ. ME **bese**, ME **besi**, ME **bessy**, ME–15 **besie**, ME–15 **besye**, ME–16 **besy**, 15 **beusie**, 16 **beisi**; *Sc.* pre-17 **beisse**, pre-17 **besey**, pre-17 **besie**, pre-17 **bessie**, pre-17 **besy**, pre-17 **besye**.

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: A word inherited from Germanic.

Etymology: Cognate with West Frisian *beuzich* working, diligent, industrious, Middle Dutch *bēsech* useful, occupied (Dutch *bezig*), Middle Low German *bēsich* diligently employed, probably < the same Germanic base as Middle Dutch *bisen*, Middle Low German *bisen*, *bissen*, *bēsen*, Old High German *bisōn* (Middle High German *bisen*, German regional *bisen*, *bisnen*), all in sense ‘to run around wildly, to bolt (especially of cattle)’ (compare in similar senses also Old Danish *bise*, *bisse* (Danish *bisse*), Old Swedish *bisa* (Swedish *besa*), probably < Middle Low German) < an extended form (s-extension) of the same Indo-European base as BIVE *v.* Compare BUSY *v.*, BUSY *n.*¹

The original stem vowel *i* is shown by Old English *bisig*; the form *bysig* (when not simply an inverted spelling with *y* for *i* in areas where Old English had been unrounded) probably shows late West Saxon rounding of the stem vowel as a result of the influence of the preceding labial consonant (compare A. Campbell *Old Eng. Gram.* (1959) §318); Middle English (and modern standard English) *busy* continues this form (although in the case of the modern standard form with the pronunciation of the unrounded variant).

Pronunciation with /ɪ/ is regularly indicated for forms spelt with *-u-* by orthoepists from the mid 16th cent. onwards (see E. J. Dobson *Eng. Pronunc. 1500–1700* (ed. 2, 1968) II. §82).

Forms such as Middle English and early modern English *besy* (see γ. forms) reflect Open Syllable Lengthening of short *i* to long close *ē*.

1. Occupied with or concentrating on a particular activity; actively engaged; doing something that engrosses the attention.

In the earlier examples this sense is sometimes difficult to distinguish from that of ‘careful, eager, anxious’ (cf. sense 4). The latter notion has now disappeared, though a trace of it is found in Johnson’s definition: ‘employed with earnestness’.

a. With *about*, *at*, *on*, *with* (also †*after*, †*mid*, †*of*, †*over*, †*umbe*, †*upon*) some object, purpose, etc.

- eOE *Metrical Dialogue of Solomon & Saturn* (Corpus Cambr. 422) i. 61 Min hige dreosed, bysig [OE *Corpus Cambr. 41* bisi] æfter bocum.
- OE ÆLFRIC *Lives of Saints* (Julius) (1881) I. 22 Oft bið seo sawul on anum þinge oððe on anum geþohte swa bysig þæt heo ne gymð hwa hyre gehende bið.
- OE ÆLFRIC *Lives of Saints* (Julius) (1881) I. 456 Se biseop wæs bysig mid þam cynincge.
- OE tr. *Apollonius of Tyre* (1958) xix. 30 Min dohtor is nu swiðe bisy ymbe hyre leornunga.
- c1390 (▶a1376) LANGLAND *Piers Plowman* (Vernon) (1867) A. VIII. l. 103 (*MED*) I schal sese of my sowynge..Ne aboute my lyflode so bisy beo no more!
- ?c1430 (▶c1400) *Rule St. Francis* (Corpus Cambr.) in F. D. Matthew *Eng. Wks. Wyclif* (1880) 40 Þæt þei be not bisi of here temporal goodis.
- 1480 R. GOOD *Let. 24 June in Cely Lett.* (1975) 83 All ouer housowld..by byssy at makynge of hay now.
- a1500 *Walter of Henley's Husbandry* (Sloane) (1890) 58 To be more ware off doinge amys & to be more besy abovte þeir werke & youris.
- 1590 SPENSER *Faerie Queene* III. VII. sig. li^v The Hag she found, Busie (as seem'd) about some wicked gin.
- 1600 SHAKESPEARE *Much Ado about Nothing* I. ii. 3 He is very busie about it.
- 1633 J. FORD *Loves Sacrifice* III. sig. G2^v I am so busie with his friuolous proiect.
- 1712 J. ADDISON *Spectator* No. 329. ¶1 He had been very busie..upon Baker's Chronicle.
- 1719 D. DEFOE *Life Robinson Crusoe* 283 He was so busy about his Father.
- 1823 C. LAMB *Oxf. in Vacation in Elia* 21 Busy as a moth over some rotten archive.
- 1874 J. R. GREEN *Short Hist. Eng. People* v. §3. 231 Busy with the cares of political office.
- 1969 'G. BLACK' *Cold Jungle* xi. 160 The birds ought to be busy on their dawn chorus.
- 1996 *World's Fair* 11 Oct. 15/5 Paul and Michael..were busy at work on the..rack-saw bench.
- 2007 *New Yorker* 2 July 39/3 The next day at school, my mind was busy with Steve Austin.

b. Without construction. Chiefly in predicative use.

- lOE *Distichs of Cato* (Trin. Cambr.) lxxxi (homiletic commentary) in *Anglia* (1972) 90 16 Gif ðe heafdu anes weges nellað, þonne sceal þæt bodig bion þy bysigre.
- ?c1225 (▶?a1200) *Ancrene Riwe* (Cleo. C.vi) (1972) 139 Se þe sechnesse is mare se þe goldsmið is bisegere.
- c1400 (▶?a1300) *Kyng Alisaunder* (Laud) l. 3902 Whan he Alisaunder besy seep.
- a1500 (▶c1380) WYCLIF *Eng. Wks.* (1880) 476 Herfore seiþ crist..þæt men shulden not be bisi to þe morowe.
- c1540 (▶?a1400) *Destr. Troy* 6047 Bise was the buerne all the bare night.
- 1611 *Bible* (King James) 1 Kings xx. 40 As thy seruant was busie here and there.
- a1616 SHAKESPEARE *Taming of Shrew* (1623) v. ii. 87 She is busie, and she cannot come.
- 1715 J. GAY *Epist. Earl Burlington* 106 Our shirts her busy fingers rub, While the sope lathers oer the foaming tub.
- 1752 JOHNSON *Rambler* No. 201. ¶12 Time slips..away, while he is either idle or busy.
- 1801 R. SOUTHEY *Thalaba* I. IV. 210 The youth, whose busy mind Dwelt on Lobabu's..words.

- 1843 T. CARLYLE *Past & Present* III. xii. 278 A People energetically busy; heaving, struggling, all shoulders at the wheel.
- 1883 J. A. FROUDE *Short Stud.* IV. II. i. 170 His children knew him as a continually busy, useful man of the world.
- 1928 S. G. H. BEAMAN *Tales of Toytown* 53 'Did you tell him I am busy?' the Mayor asked.
- 1964 H. E. KEYES in E. D. Andrews & F. Andrews *Shaker Furnit.* p. ix The fruit of happily busy hands.
- 2007 *Independent* 26 Mar. 33/1 One [bank] window open for service while the rest of them try to look busy at the back.

c.

(a) With *in*, preceding simple noun. In later use chiefly in ***busy in thought*** (cf. *deep in thought* at THOUGHT *n.* Phrases 5a).

- ?c1225 (▷?a1200) *Ancrene Riwe* (Cleo. C.vi) (1972) 68 Þus ha beoð aa bisie in þis fule meoster.
- c1390 in *Archiv f. das Studium der Neueren Sprachen* (1877) 57 245 (MED) And beo bisy in hire seruys.
- a1400 (▷c1300) *Northern Homily: Serm. on Gospels* (Coll. Phys.) in *Middle Eng. Dict.* at *Bisi* Me bihoued..Be bisi in mi fader needes.
- a1475 in W. C. Hazlitt *Remains Early Pop. Poetry Eng.* (1866) II. 20 Be bessy in Godis servys.
- 1596 *Raigne of Edward III* sig. E2^v I haue discribde my Lord, As I was busie in my watchfull charge. The proud Armado of king Edwards ships.
- 1663 SIR C. LYTTTELTON *Let.* 13 Jan. in E. M. Thompson *Corr. Family of Hatton* (1878) I. 30 I am soe buisy..in the dispatch of a fleete.
- 1702 N. ROWE *Ambitious Step-mother* (ed. 2) i. i. 235 So busie were my faculties in thought.
- 1840 DICKENS *Master Humphrey's Clock* I. 97 It is curious to imagine these people of the world, busy in thought, turning their eyes toward the countless spheres that shine above us.
- 2000 T. PIJUAN *Pueblo Indian Wisdom* i. 13 Grandfather was busy in thought and weaving.

(b) With *in* or (now usually) with preposition omitted, and verbal noun: occupied doing something.

- 1516 J. SKAYMAN in *Farming & Gardening in Late Medieval Norfolk* (Norfolk Rec. Soc.) (1997) 118 I was besy in gatheryng vppe mony for my master ageyn the obite day.
- c1680 W. BEVERIDGE *Serm.* (1729) I. 430 Busie in providing a suitable entertainment.
- ?1697 J. LEWIS *Mem. Duke of Glocester* (1789) 38 He was then very busy shewing how he would have me build a ship.
- 1713 J. ADDISON in *Guardian* 20 July 1/1 Busie in finding out the Art of Flying.
- 1756 tr. J. G. Keyssler *Trav.* I. xxiii. 211 In the mean time she was busy packing up in her palace.
- 1837 H. MARTINEAU *Society in Amer.* II. 6 All hands were busy in unshipping the cargo, to lighten the vessel.
- 1847 W. E. FORSTER 27 Aug. in T. W. Reid *Life W. E. Forster* (1888) I. vii. 209 He [sc. Carlyle] is busy sleeping.
- 1859 'G. ELIOT' *Adam Bede* I. i. vi. 131 Men are busy there mending the harness.

- 1910 *Church Times* 11 Nov. 631/2 We have lately been busy in deploring the sabotage of the French railway strikers.
- 1925 W. CATHER *Professor's House* I. xiii. 143 Ever since it was finished, plumbers and masons and carpenters had been kept busy patching and repairing it.
- 1986 R. NARAYAN *Talkative Man* 34 His hands busy nailing and cutting frames.
- 2006 *Bark* Jan. 12 I also take her to doggie daycare when I am busy working.

d. Similarly with *to do something* (formerly also †*for*, †*for to do*, something). Now *rare*.

- 1340 *Ayenbite* (1866) 226 Zaynte pael wybnimþ þe yonge wyfmen wodewen, þet were ydele and bysye to guonne an to comene ganglind.
- a1425 (þa1400) *Prick of Conscience* (Galba & Harl.) (1863) l. 5489 Þe devels..þat to tempte men..ay er bysy.
- a1425 WYCLIF *Sel. Eng. Wks.* (1869) I. 36 Men..shulden be bisye for blisse.
- a1464 J. CAPGRAVE *Abbreuiacion of Cron.* (Cambr. Gg.4.12) (1983) 73 If we be bisi for to gete us tresoure in heuene, God schal send us sufficiens in erde.
- a1500 (þ?a1450) *Gesta Romanorum* (Harl. 7333) 245 (MED) Late vs be euer besye to plese god.
- 1533 T. MORE *Answer Poysened Bk.* Pref. sig. Aa.iiii^v The leche that..sytteth by the syke man bysy about to cure hym.
- 1629 tr. S. Pelegromius *Descr. S'hertogenbosh* 21 The English were busie to fill the ditch.
- 1726 *Life of Penn* in *Wks.* I. 138 Busie for Forms.
- 1792 T. HOLCROFT *Anna St. Ives* VI. cxii. 183 All hell seems busy to blacken me!
- 1837 T. CARLYLE *French Revol.* III. v. v. 321 Busy for his share, in 'organizing victory'.
- 1899 *Mod. Lang. Notes* 14 304/1 In our days the ferment of the ancient epics is again busy to pervade literature.
- 1921 U. SINCLAIR *Bk. of Life* 119 A wise ruler..is apt to be surrounded by a class of parasites..who are busy to thwart his will.
- 1998 J. POWWER in J. Miedema et al. *Perspectives Bird's Head* 178 He was busy to establish and extend his power.

2.

a. In extended use of (material or immaterial) things: continually active; occupied or engaged (in some activity).

- OE *Battle of Maldon* (1942) 110 Hi leton þa of folman..garas fleogan; bogan wæron bysige.
- 1586 in W. A. Craigie *Maitland Quarto MS* (1920) 140 My pen wes bessie till endyite.
- a1616 SHAKESPEARE *Henry V* (1623) IV. o. 14 The Armourers.., With busie Hammers closing Riouets vp.
- a1763 W. SHENSTONE *Wks.* (1764) I. 308 Birds..With busy pinion skim the glitt'ring wave.
- 1779 E. CLARK *Misc. Poems* 111 He view'd the busy, pecking train, Regaling rich on pubble grain.

- 1813 SCOTT *Rokeby* I. iii. 6 Grief was busy in his breast.
- 1827 T. CARLYLE tr. J. A. Musæus in *German Romance* I. 110 The screeching of the busy saw did not escape his ear.
- a1854 H. REED *Lect. Eng. Lit.* (1855) iv. 143 Time is busy in the work of change.
- 1863 A. W. KINGLAKE *Invasion of Crimea* I. vii. 98 For many days rumour was busy.
- 1874 J. R. GREEN *Short Hist. Eng. People* vi. §3. 290 Busy as was Caxton's printing-press.
- 1922 V. LAURISTON *Twenty-first Burr* ix. 99 Miss Fan Sifton was seated beside her on the porch, her busy needles clicking.
- 2002 P. NORTON & S. H. CLARK *Peter Norton's New Inside PC* II. 198 [With this device] it is possible to receive a fax while the printer was busy printing a separate document.

b. orig. *U.S. spec.* Of a telephone or telephone line: = ENGAGED *adj.* 3;
(of a signal, etc.) indicating this. See also *busy tone n.* at Special uses 2.

- 1883 *Kansas City Rev. Sci. & Industry* Oct. 367 The operator..quickly tests..whether that line is busy or not.
- 1894 *Jrnl. Electr. Engin.* **23** 63 False busy signals were frequently received. Now a third wire and an automatic restoring indicator has made the busy test reliable.
- 1898 *Bibliotheca Sacra* July 532 He claims that the attorneys for the League were not notified because their telephone was busy.
- 1913 G. BURGESS *Love in Hurry* 235 Hello!.. Yes, the phone was busy; some one just rang me up.
- 1997 J. STEINGARTEN *Man who ate Everything* (1998) v. 341 Its consumer help line was busy for a entire day.
- 2003 *Herald Sun* (Melbourne) (Nexis) 31 July 69 He had planned to give evidence by telephone but his mobile was busy each time..[the] tribunal chairman..called.

3.

†**a.** Devoted to some business; active, assiduous, diligent, industrious.
Of a warrior: keen to fight, bold. *Obs.*

In later use merged with 3b.

- OE *Paris Psalter* (1932) lviii. 3 Ði nu mine sawle swiþe bysigge feondas mine fæcne ofþryhtum [read ofþryhtun].
- c1225 (†?c1200) *St. Margaret* (Bodl.) 36 Ich am in hare beddes se bisie ham a-buten, þet summes-weis ha schulen ham sclepinde sulen.
- c1275 (†?a1200) LA3AMON *Brut* (Calig.) (1963) l. 3191 Moni bisie kempen, þeo fihten wið þone duke al þene dæi longe.
- a1375 *William of Palerne* (1867) l. 1423 (MED) xxx busy burnes, barounes ful bolde.
- †a1387 J. TREVISA tr. R. Higden *Polychron.* (St. John's Cambr.) (1871) III. 353 (MED) He made hym [sc. Plato] so besy to fynde þe solucioun of þe questioun, and so he deide.
- c1475 (†c1445) R. PECOCK *Donet* 27 (MED) Sone, it is forto wille, chese, and be bisie forto knowe..alle þo trouþis.
- 1488 (†c1478) HARY *Actis & Deidis Schir William Wallace* (Adv.) (1968–9) III. l. 390 He in wer was

besy, wicht and wis.

- a1500 *Lancelot of Laik* (1870) 2449 He was bissy and was deligent.
- 1565 R. WEVER *Lusty Juventus* sig. Di Yea, by Gods foot that I wyll be bisye And I may saye to you I can play the knaue secretly.
- 1670 T. BLOUNT *Glossographia* (ed. 3) *Operose*, busie, diligent in labour.

b. Constantly or habitually occupied; always active or employed; having a great deal to do. Of things: constantly active or in motion.

- ▶a1398 J. TREVISA tr. Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (BL Add. 27944) (1975) II. XVIII. xxv. 1165 Nopyng is more busy and witty þan þe hound.
- c1405 (▶c1385) CHAUCER *Knight's Tale* (Hengwrt) (2003) l. 633 The bisy [c1410 *Harl.* 7334 busy, c1430 *Cambr. Gg.4.27* besye] larke, messenger of daye.
- 1548 H. LATIMER *Notable Serm.* sig. D.vi^v No Lordelye loyterer..,but a busie ploughe man.
- 1628 J. EARLE *Micro-cosmogr.* xiii. sig. C12^v The busie mans recreation, the idle mans businesse.
- 1702 N. ROWE *Ambitious Step-mother* (ed. 2) i. i. 220 The Etherial Energy That busie restless Principle.
- 1720 I. WATTS *Divine & Moral Songs* xx How doth the little busy bee Improve each shining hour!
- 1729 W. LAW *Serious Call* iii. 37 Penitens was a busy, notable Tradesman, and very prosperous in his dealings.
- 1814 SCOTT *Waverley* I. viii. 102 Curiosity, the busiest passion of the idle.
- 1834 T. CARLYLE *Sartor Resartus* I. iii. 5/2 A most busy brain.
- 1898 M. A. VON ARNIM *Elizabeth & her German Garden* 37 Our neighbour and his wife are both busy and charming, with a whole troop of..children to keep them occupied.
- 1929 H. W. HAGGARD *Devils, Drugs, & Doctors* v. 108 Simpson was a busy practitioner. His writing was done in snatches.
- 1958 *Woman* 18 Oct. 4/3 In these days of 'ready-mix' cakes, 'instant puddings' and other time-saving boons to the busy housewife.
- 1998 A. WOOD *EastEnders* (BBC TV script) Episode 603. 24 Come on, spit it out. I'm a busy woman.

c. Reduplicated for emphasis, esp. in **busy, busy, busy**: indicating frenetic or constant activity, or that a person has too much to do (sometimes with the implication that a person is ostentatiously or affectedly busy).

- 1672 DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM *Rehearsal* v. i. 44 In scorching noon-day, whil'st the traveller stayes, Busie, busie, busie, busie, we bustle along.
- 1832 J. K. PAULDING *Westward Ho!* II. xiii. 140 Then she goes on, busy, busy, busy, never satisfied, more work, more money, and all for the dem publique good.
- 1887 J. T. TROWBRIDGE *Little Master* xxviii. 211 'Busy! busy! busy!' was his ever-recurring excuse. But Mrs. Corson bethought her that he could always find time for a good dinner.
- 1913 A. ROTHERY *Our Common Road* 283 Too busy to come—too busy to stay—too busy to go—busy,

busy, busy—that is the slogan of the modern woman!

1955 *Chicago Sunday Tribune* 30 Jan. IV. 5 (*adv.*) They [*sc.* university graduates] usually occupy positions where they are busy, busy, busy always!

1996 *Time Out* 31 July 72/3 We're talking to New York's home office set here, laptops-a-go-go, busy busy.

†4. Solicitous, concerned; anxious, uneasy, troubled; careful, attentive. Of desires, prayers, etc.: earnest, eager, persistent; (of suffering) severe, continual. *Obs.*

See also Phrases 1.

OE (Northumbrian) *Lindisf. Gospels: Matt. (headings to readings)* xx *Sed regnum dei omnibus præferendum docet nec debere sollicitum esse in crastinum* : ah ric Godes allum fore læras ne rehtlic is bisig sie in morgen.

OE ÆLFRIC *Catholic Homilies: 2nd Ser.* (Cambr. Gg.3.28) xxxi. 270 Drihten bead þæt we næron bysige and carfulle cweðende, hwæt sceole we etan oððe hwæt drincan.

IOE tr. R. d'Escures *Sermo in Festis Sancte Marie Virginis* in R. D.-N. Warner *Early Eng. Homilies* (1917) 134 Martha, Martha, þu eart bisig and gedrefd on feale þingan.

IOE tr. R. d'Escures *Sermo in Festis Sancte Marie Virginis* in R. D.-N. Warner *Early Eng. Homilies* (1917) 138 Heo [*sc.* Mary] nis na læng bisig to fostrigen hire Sune swa swa cilde.

a1375 *William of Palerne* (1867) l. 588 (*MED*) Þat burde was euer hire bi, busy hire to plese.

►a1393 GOWER *Confessio Amantis* (Fairf.) IV. l. 509 With besy herte to poursuie Thing which that is to love due.

c1400 (►1391) CHAUCER *Treat. Astrolabe* (Cambr. Dd.3.53) (1872) Prol. 1 Thy bisi preyere..to lerne the tretis of the astrelabie.

?1406 T. HOCCLEVE *La Mâle Règle* l. 25 in E. P. Hammond *Eng. Verse between Chaucer & Surrey* (1927) 60/2 My grief and bisy smert.

?c1450 (►?a1400) WYCLIF *Eng. Wks.* (1880) 362 Bissy study and contemplacyon.

1483 (►1413) *Pilgrimage of Soul* (Caxton) iv. xxiv. f. lxx v Besy entendement to that that she techeth.

1513 G. DOUGLAS tr. Virgil *Æneid* VII. vii. 10 The byssy curis of Turnus mariage Skalding hir breist and mynd all in a rage.

a1525 *Eng. Conquest Ireland* (Trin. Dublin) 104 Throgh bysy besechyng of the erle.

5.

a. Of an action, occupation, etc.: energetically carried on; pursued vigorously (now *rare*). Of conditions, business, trade, etc.: that keeps a person or persons constantly occupied.

c1275 (►?a1200) LA3AMON *Brut* (Calig.) (1963) l. 1097 He ferde ouer Scotte water..& mid bisie [c1300 *Otho* busie] i-filhte Brut-lond heo wolden iwinnen.

►a1393 GOWER *Confessio Amantis* (Fairf.) II. l. 1764 He made a besi haste And hath assembled him an host.

a1475 in A. Clark *Eng. Reg. Godstow Nunnery* (1911) I. 167 Aftur mani respites of deliberacion..& a

- bisi tretinge I-made bitwene hem.
 1548 H. LATIMER *Notable Serm.* sig. B.iii Right prelatynge is buisye labouryng.
 1591 R. GREENE *Second Pt. Conny-catching* sig. F2 The Black Arte is picking of Lockes, and to this busie trade two persons are required.
 a1657 G. DANIEL *Poems* (1878) II. 82 Poor crawling Emmetts! in what busie toyle Wee slip away our Time?
 1718 POPE tr. Homer *Iliad* IV. XVI. 778 On ev'ry side the busy Combate grows.
 1769 *Junius Lett.* xxiii. 112 The latest moments of your life were dedicated to the same..busy agitations.
 1814 L. HUNT *Feast of Poets* 33 Persons of every kind who are engaged in the busier pursuits of society.
 1872 J. YEATS *Growth Commerce* 143 A busy trade in timber.
 1972 F. MANSUR *Bodrum* iii. 58 The older tailors..are usually alone, with an apprentice or two when things get busy.
 2010 *Evening Standard* (Nexis) 11 June [The doctor] admitted to mistakes during 'very busy' conditions in A&E.

b. Of a time or place: full of business or activity.

- 1530 TYNDALE *Pract. Prelates* sig. C.vii^v Fynallye in this busye worlde y^e Kinges of Lumbardyge gatte a litle might.
 1647 A. COWLEY *Wish* in *Mistress* i Well then; I now do plainly see, This busie world and I shall ne're agree.
 1697 DRYDEN tr. Virgil *Georgics* IV, in tr. Virgil *Wks.* 123 For thy Bees a quiet Station find..And plant..Wild Olive Trees..before the buisye Shop.
 1708 SWIFT *Predict. for 1708* 5 The Time that he enters Libra,..which is the busy Period of the Year.
 a1774 A. TUCKER *Light of Nature* (1777) IV. II. 308 The hopes that tinsel the gay and busy hours of life.
 1814 BYRON *Lara* I. i. 5 Bright faces in the busy hall.
 1871 J. MORLEY *Crit. Misc.* (1878) 1st Ser. 262 These remote heights apart from the busy world of men.
 1925 *Times* 3 Mar. 19/6 The 'Elephant [and Castle]' was a busy traffic centre in the days of coaches.
 1961 L. MUMFORD *City in Hist.* xv. 473 The strain of living..within sound of a busy motorway or airport.
 1989 A. AIRD *1990 Good Pub Guide* 281 It [sc. a pub] gets busy at weekends.
 1992 *Financial Times of Canada* 14 Nov. 1/2 Cineplex is entering the busy Christmas season.
 2000 N. HORNBY in N. Hornby *Speaking with Angel* 105 'You're in for a busy day,' one of the others said.

6. In negative sense: active in what does not concern one; prying, inquisitive, gossiping; meddlesome, officious, interfering. Now somewhat arch. Cf. BUSYBODY *n.*

- 1340 *Ayenbite* (1866) 58 (MED) Ine þo ydele wordes me zeneʒeþ..yef hi spekb̄ bisye wordes [etc.].
 ?a1425 (†c1400) *Mandeville's Trav.* (Titus C.xvi) (1919) 196 Þei asked him [sc. Alisandre] whi he
 was so proud & so fierce & so bisy for to putten all the world vnder his subiectioun.
 c1475 *Lerne or be Lewde* (Harl. 5086) in *Babees Bk.* (2002) I. 9 To Bolde, ne to Bisy, ne Bourde nat
 to large.
 1574 J. BARET *Aluearie* B 1478 A Busie man a medler in all matters.
 a1631 J. DONNE *Poems* (1633) 169 Busie old foole, unruly Sunne, Why dost thou thus, Through
 windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
 1679 *Trials Green, Berry, & Hill for Murder of Sir E. Godfrey* 14 He was a busie man, and..would do
 a great deal of mischief.
 1747 S. RICHARDSON *Clarissa* II. i. 5 A sort of fiddling, busy, yet..un-busy man.
 1754 M. DELANY *Autobiogr. & Corr.* (1862) 2nd Ser. III. 299 How that little busy, mischievous fiend,
 jealousy, torments the best minds sometimes.
 1818 S. T. COLERIDGE *Friend* (new ed.) I. 157 A busy and inquisitorial tyranny.
 1863 H. GRANT *Mariquita* 142 [One] so young and beautiful—Could hardly hope to escape the busy
 talk Of idle neighbours.
 1920 S. LEWIS *Main St.* II. viii. 98 A lot of old tabbies always busy criticizing.
 2000 J. J. CONNOLLY *Layer Cake* (2004) 111 ‘That's none of your business. Don't get busy, okay?’

†7. Occupied to the full, or to the limit of one's powers. **to be busy enough**: to be hard put (to do something). **to be busy to do** (a thing): to be preoccupied or fully occupied with it alone. Cf. ALBUSY *adv. Obs.*

- †a1387 J. TREVISA tr. R. Higden *Polychron.* (St. John's Cambr.) (1872) IV. 453 (MED) Þe Est
 ʒate..was so hevy of sound bras þat twenty men were bisy i-now for to tende it.
 c1405 (†c1385) CHAUCER *Knight's Tale* (Hengwrt) (2003) I. 1584 Swich stryf..Bitwixe Venus..And
 Mars..That Iuppiter was bisy it to stente.
 c1540 (†?a1400) *Destr. Troy* 10388 Þe kyng..harmyt hym sore, Þat bisi was þe buerne to bide in his
 sadill.

8.

†a. Of a thing: involving much work, care, or trouble; elaborate, intricate. *Obs.*

- 1448 *Will of Henry VI* in R. Willis & J. W. Clark *Archit. Hist. Univ. Cambr.* (1886) I. 354 (MED)
 Curiose werkes of entaille and bisy moldyng.
 1536 J. HUSEE *Let.* 27 Apr. in *Lisle Papers* (P.R.O.: SP 3/12/53) f. 59 It [sc. a cushion to be worked]
 wilbe very busy because of dyversyte of colorys.
 1542 N. UDALL tr. Erasmus *Apophthegmes* f. 51^v Buisie and sumptuous buildynges.
 1577 H. I. tr. H. Bullinger *50 Godlie Serm.* II. III. v. sig. Ff.ij^v/2 The maner of consecrating them, is
 farre more large and busie.
 1615 H. CROOKE *Μικροκοσμογραφια* 925 The History of the Bones is a busie piece of Worke.

b. In negative sense: (of a design, etc.) having much detail; excessively detailed or decorated; over-elaborate.

- 1862 *Civil Engineer & Architect's Jrnal*. **25** 94/2 The polygonal ribs of the trusses..are coloured with alternate lengths of red and blue..upon which a rather too..busy pattern is executed.
- 1876 *Descriptive Catal. Bronzes South Kensington Museum* 97 A certain..busy profusion of ornament agree also rather with the manner of that artist than with the more classic feeling of Verrocchio.
- 1909 *Athenæum* 1 May 535/3 His pictures..look a little 'busy', and ask to be displayed..with..reasonable relief of bare space.
- 1947 S. J. PERELMAN *Acres & Pains* xx. 119 They then they papered the bedroom with a busy pattern of satyrs and dryads.
- 1997 *Canad. Geographic* July 82/2 It is an opportunity to showcase rare..artifacts... Unfortunately, that opportunity is squandered by busy layouts.
- 2005 *Independent* 11 May (Property section) 7/1 If you have lots of 'busy' prints on fabrics and furnishings, change them for a few bold designs instead.

9. That indicates activity.

- 1611 J. DONNE *Funerall Elegie* in *Anat. World* sig. B8 The worlds busie noyse to ouercome.
- 1645 MILTON *L'Allegro* in *Poems* 35 The busie humm of men.
- 1716 LADY M. W. MONTAGU *Let.* 3 Aug. (1965) I. 249 People with..busie faces.
- 1856 H. MAYHEW *Great World London* IX. 129 The building assumed the busy aspect of a large factory.
- 1937 *Amer. Home* Apr. 115/1 The birds..seemed not the least concerned over its [sc. the windmill's] busy clatter.
- 1997 J. RYAN *Dismantling Mr Doyle* xii. 179 The bustle with which she passed milk jugs and sugar bowls created a busy din.
- 2005 A. SAGE *Magyk* xviii. 183 After ten years of waking every day to the busy sounds of The Ramblings,..the silence was deafening.

PHRASES

†**P1. to do one's busy pain (also care, cure, diligence):** to exert oneself diligently, to do what one can. **with busy pain (also care, cure, diligence):** with great care or effort, diligently. *Obs.*

Cf. BUSINESS *n.* 2.

- ?a1430 T. HOCCLEVE *Mother of God* l. 108 in *Minor Poems* (1892) I. 55 (MED) Do your bysy payne To wasse away our cloudeful offense.
- a1475 J. RUSSELL *Bk. Nurture* (Harl. 4011) in *Babees Bk.* (2002) I. 199 My copy..whiche to drawe out [I] haue do my besy diligence.

- c1503 R. ARNOLD *Chron.* f. lxxxxiv/1 This lytil yle..For to repayre do ay thy besy cure.
- ?1518 A. BARCLAY tr. D. Mancinus *Myrroure Good Maners* sig. B.i^v Therefore dothe he study and muse with busy cure His dedes to redresse.
- 1554 D. LINDSAY *Dialog Experience & Courteour* I. sig. E.i I sall do my besye cure To tak the best.
- 1633 P. FLETCHER *Purple Island* x. xl. 144 A thousand Knights woo'd her with busie pain.
- 1673 J. FLAVELL *Fountain of Life* xxiii. 295 With busie diligence, to make himself ready for his death.
- 1692 DRYDEN *Eleonora* 19 Her fellow Saints with busie care, will look For her blest Name.
- 1737 H. BAKER *Medulla Poetarum Romanorum* I. 101 And now the Warriors all with busy Care, Whet the dull Sword.

P2. (as) busy as a bee: very busy or industrious (and typically happily so); fully engaged with some occupation (cf. BEE *n.*¹ 1b).

- c1405 (†c1395) CHAUCER *Merchant/Franklin Link* (Hengwrt) (2003) l. 4 For ay as bisy as bees Ben they [sc. women] vs sely men for to [de]ceyue.
- 1535 W. STEWART tr. H. Boethius *Bk. Cron. Scotl.* (1858) II. 445 Now ar tha maid als bissie as ane be.
- 1690 W. WALKER *Idiomatologia Anglo-Lat.* 74 You are as busie as a bee.
- a1788 N. COTTON *Var. Pieces Verse & Prose* (1791) I. 107 Thus four or five of us you'll see, And each as busy as a bee.
- 1866 *Harper's Mag.* Dec. 51/2 Throughout the day Frank was as busy as a bee,..and the roll of bills in his vest pocket biggened.
- 1995 P. MCCABE *Dead School* (1996) 163 All the mammies were busy as bees chatting away and talking about all the little kiddies as Malachy came trotting in the school gates.

†**P3. to be busy with** (*euphem.*): to engage in sexual activity with.
Obs.

- 1525 in B. Cusack *Everyday Eng. 1500–1700* (1998) 108 Looke well to yor awn seruauntis for..ther can noo woman goo theyr [sc. into the forest]..but they wilbe busy with them.
- 1612 W. FENNOR *Cornu-copiae* 27 Thou hast bene too busy with a man, And art with child.
- 1728 C. CIBBER *Vanbrugh's Provok'd Husband* II. i. 20 You would have the Impudence to Sup, and be busy with her.
- 1826 S. REYNOLDS *Jrnl.* 19 Aug. (1989) I. 148 She had given orders for Tuanou to be banished, for being busy with Tenow!

P4. to get busy. *colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*).

a. To become active; to begin to act. Frequently in imperative phrases **let's (also now, etc.) get busy.**

- 1896 *Locomotive* Oct. 157 The boys have no great love for the work, and one or more overseers stand over them constantly, urging them..to 'get busy'.
- 1906 W. MCCAY *Little Nemo in Slumberland* 23 Sept. in *Little Nemo 1905–1914* (2000) 58 Come on!

You fellows get busy!.. Get a move on you!

- 1936 J. STEINBECK *In Dubious Battle* iii. 24 They'll give him the works if George doesn't get busy.
- 1987 I. RANKIN *Knots & Crosses* xv. 78 Drop what you're doing and get busy on tracing this car.
- 1999 *Maximum PC* Oct. 14 Now get busy and write us.
- 2000 B. L. WHITFORD & K. JONES *Accountability, Assessment, & Teacher Commitment* iv. 79 'Okay, let's get busy.' In less than a minute, Mary Jo has skillfully redirected the energy in the room.

b. euphem. To engage in amorous behaviour or sexual activity. Also with *on, with* (a person). Cf. *to be busy with* at Phrases 3.

- 1969 B. BREMSER *Troia* i. 62 Every once and awhile I am nudged by his drooping thigh to get busy on him also... I gag on his cock.
- 1970 in E. Cray *Bawdy Ballads* 10/2 Oh, daughter, oh, daughter, you were a silly fool, To get busy with a man With a tool like a mule.
- 1989 T. WILLIAMS *Cocaine Kids* 138 (Gloss.) A number of terms relate to sexual behavior, including..getting busy.
- 2000 *Esquire* July 123/2 Founded in 1916, when the pilot of a private, two-seater plane realised the new 'autopilot' left his hands free to get busy with his female co-pilot, the Mile High Club is still chalking up plenty of new recruits.
- 2010 M. D. EWELL *To love Amari* x. 172 'I can't get enough of you either! I love you so!' We were getting busy when the phone rang.

SPECIAL USES

S1. Forming parasynthetic and complementary adjectives (in early use often with pejorative connotations: see sense 6, and cf. BUSYBODY *n.*, BUSYHEAD *n.*²).

busy-brained *adj.*

- 1573 G. GASCOIGNE *Disc. Aduentures Master F. I. in Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* 279 Thou hast three such busie brayned sisters, as I thincke shortly their heads will breake.
- 1684 M. WHEELER tr. Plutarch *Of Curiosity* in M. Morgan et al. tr. Plutarch *Morals* II. vi. 167 Busy-brain'd people do so twist and turn themselves to every frivolous Show.
- 1867 *Atlantic Monthly* Nov. 577/1 Let us watch the habits of some of these busy-brained men, these great masters of the intellectual world.
- 2001 *Sugar* Feb. 117/3 A busy-brained person like you shouldn't spend so much time doing nothing.

busy-fingered *adj.*

- 1604 J. MARSTON *Malcontent* v. iii. sig. H2^v He is even one of the most busy fingerd lords.
- 1873 *Once a Week* 8 Nov. 415/2 These little pellets..grow dry and hard, ready for busy-fingered girls to wrap paper cases round them.

2001 *Nat. Health* Oct. 71/1 Busy-fingered fans cite its [sc. knitting's] therapeutic qualities as being the number one reason for loving the hobby.

† **busy-headed** *adj.* *Obs.*

a1555 N. RIDLEY in Coverdale *Certain Lett. Martyrs* (1564) 64 The deuiles Galtropes that he casteth in our wayes by some of hys busye headed yonkers.

1583 P. STUBBES *Second Pt. Anat. Abuses* sig. I2 These busie heded astronomers, & curious serching astrologers.

1633 *Costlie Whore* IV. sig. F4^v A plague upon this busie-headed rabble.

1737 E. ARROWSMITH *Duty of Following* 8 Factious and busy-headed Men..are apt to ask, How much, and to what Degree, is this to be paid?

1856 H. MORLEY *Jerome Cardan* I. xiii. 254 Nicolo went off by no means easy in his mind. The secret was no longer his own, and Cardan was a busy-headed fellow.

busy-looking *adj.*

1722 POPE *Let.* 10 Oct. in *Literary Corr.* (1735) I. 143 That idle, busy-looking Sanhedrin.

1803 M. BERRY *Jrnl.* 12 May (1865) II. 248 Grenoble is a very cheerful, well-built, busy-looking town.

1915 H. S. HARRISON *Angela's Business* xx. 287 'I hope', the formal caller added, with a glance toward the busy-looking desk, 'I'm not interrupting?'

2007 *Pittsburgh Post-Gaz.* (Nexis) 9 Aug. s1 He turned to the front door as a busy-looking woman answered.

busy-tongued *adj.*

1530 G. JOYE tr. *Psalter of David* f. 223^v Let nothyng prosper in therthe with this besy tonged & lyinge man.

1796 T. TOWNSHEND *Summary Def. Edmund Burke* I. 23 All that the most malignant busy-tongued calumny..could set in motion, have been impelled against..his public reputation.

1878 R. B. SMITH *Carthage* 255 Busy-tongued rumour passed from mouth to mouth.

1993 I. DOIG *Heart Earth* 17 The busy-tongued Ringer family.

S2.

busy idleness *n.* occupation or employment in trivial matters, idleness disguised as busyness; a tendency to engage in this; cf.

BUSY-IDLE *adj.* 1.

1592 G. HARVEY *Foure Lett.* (new ed.) iii. 44 Some of our pens might haue bene employed to better vse, then this idle businesse, or rather busy idlenesse.

1684 T. TRYON *Friendly Advice to Gentlemen-planters* III. 149 Your Bones shall presently pay for the busie Idleness of your Brains, and the Sauciness of your Tongue.

- 1781 GIBBON *Decline & Fall* III. xxvii. 13 The eager pursuit of religious controversy afforded a new occupation to the busy idleness of the metropolis.
- 1859 *Once Week* 23 July 75/1 A County History..affords its own sober enjoyment. It is busy idleness to doze over its records.
- 1921 *National Engineer* Sept. 445/3 The pains we take in books or arts which treat of things remote from the use of life, is a busy idleness.
- 1997 E. KAUFMANN in C. Weedon *Postwar Women's Writing in German* 201 The destructive effects of the busy idleness and non-productivity that were gaining the upper hand.

busy idler *n.* a person or a thing employed in busy idleness.

- 1788 *World* 13 Dec. The Advertiser will make use of such precautions as will prevent either himself, or others, from being exposed to curious busy idlers.
- 1876 *Primitive Methodist Mag.* Jan. 34 The butterfly..is a busy idler, who lives on the sweets of the present as they may be gathered from flower to flower.
- 1917 W. DURANT *Philos. & Social Probl.* 218 It is well that philosophy..should be scorned as a busy idler.
- 1995 P. M. MITCHELL *Johann Christoph Gottsched* 78 A stock humorous character, the busy idler.

busy Lizzie *n.* the East African shrub *Impatiens walleriana* (family Balsaminaceae), having abundant, typically red, pink, or white spurred flowers, and whose various hybrids and cultivated varieties are widely grown as house or bedding plants.

- 1938 *Spirit Lake Beacon (Iowa)* 6 Oct. Louis Guritz brought a new plant for our room. Louis says it is a Busy Lizzie.
- 1956 X. FIELD *House Plants* 79 *Impatiens*..gathered nicknames, and among them were Patient Lucy, Patience Plant or just Busy Lizzie.
- 1970 *Woman's Own* 21 Mar. 23/1 The table where the variegated busy lizzie fought for living-space with the telephone.
- 2005 *Gardenlife* Oct. 72/2 Hanging baskets planted with busy Lizzies are a traditional favourite.

busy tone *n.* orig. *U.S.* a sound indicating to a caller that a telephone line is engaged (cf. sense 2b).

- 1902 *Electr. World & Engineer* 11 Oct. 383/2 If Y is busy both relay coils receive current and the relay fails, the busy tone being supplied to X through the back contacts.
- 1914 W. ATKINS *Princ. Automatic Teleph.* 27 If all the lines are engaged the wipers will rotate to this busy-tone circuit.
- 1978 D. GOINES *Crime Partners* 148 He finally found the dime, dropped the coin in the box, and dialed the number... He got a busy tone.
- 2002 M. TALBOT-SMITH *Audio Engineer's Ref. Bk.* § 6.9 [The] busy tone is returned..when the wanted party is engaged on another call and this has given the tone its alternative name 'engaged tone'.

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