

Parsing Notes for - Plough on. Published June 2021 on madryncrosswords.com.

I set myself a challenge to compile a puzzle which includes one word each for all ten sounds represented by the letters OUGH in English. Ten may be pushing it a bit, two of the sounds, as far as I'm aware, only appear in one word each, and they are both alternate spellings of words more familiar with more sensible spellings. I think (hope) solving the puzzle should become easier once you spot the theme. It actually made it more difficult to set, partly because, inevitably, the same four letters came up so often but also because a number of the words I chose were quite difficult to define in a way I could use in the clues. I enjoyed compiling this puzzle though and hope you find it interesting to solve.

Clues consist of 'definitions' either at the start or end, which I underline in these notes and 'wordplay' which I explain below the solution.

Across

1 Half open hotel in bid for prize (6)

TROPHY

Bid - TRY

Around half OPen and hotel - H

4 Spasm is temporary problem (8)

HICCOUGH

A straight-forward double definition of hiccup, which is caused by a spasm of the diaphragm but this is the first of the alternate spellings I mentioned above. It appears in each dictionary I looked at, though they all attributed it to 'confusion' with the spelling of cough. This silly mistake makes it the only time the letters OUGH represent the sound up.

10 Increases in Putin's cash absorbs press (9)

REDOUBLES

Putin's cash - ROUBLES around (absorbs) press - ED (for editor)

11 At first the old unregulated guest houses were Spartan (5)

TOUGH

Initial letters (at first...) The Old Unregulated Guest Houses

12 See something horrible in Irish lake (5)

LOUGH

See - LO Something horrible - UGH

Basically the same word as the Scottish loch but in Ireland it's spelt this way. The English word means a loch in Ireland and so is a separate word from, rather than an alternate spelling of loch I suppose. It's listed separately in Chambers at least.

13 Most unjust uproar around soccer administrators before international (9)

UNFAIREST

Uproar - UNREST around soccer administrators - FA and international - I

14 Painstaking, missing nothing from one end to the other (7)

THROUGH

Painstaking - THoROUGH less an O (missing nothing)

16 Sounds like proper ceremony (4)

RITE

Homophone indicated by 'sounds like' of RITE - right (proper)

19 Thanks Lucy occasionally for cosmetics (4)

TALC

Thanks - TA and alternative letters (occasionally) of LuCy

21 Smell harsh in part of town (7)

BOROUGH

Smell - BO and harsh - ROUGH

Apparently a borough is a town or part of a town represented by at least one MP.

24 Spooner's joyless broadcast for artisan product (9)

SOURDOUGH

Obviously a spoonerism - doursow.

Dour - joyless, sow - broadcast

25 Should 11s front-runner drop back? (5)

OUGHT

TOUGH (11 across) with the T moved to the back

Actually 'ought to' means should but I hope this definition is close enough. This was one of the awkward words to define!

26 Black bird loses height to hawk (5)

COUGH

Black bird - ChOUGH (a bird of the crow family) without the H - height.

27 Turn to right-leaning characters to create stress (9)

ITALICISE

Double cryptic definition? *Italic* letters lean to the right and are often used for emphasis (or stress)

28 Outfit for musicians (8)

ENSEMBLE

Another double definition

29 Celestial choir secretly sang elsewhere (6)

ANGELS

Hidden word, indicated by 'secretly' in sANG ELSEwhere

Down

1 Finger food taster left empty for a change (8)

TARTLETS

One of the few anagrams in this puzzle, indicated by 'for a change' , of TASTER and Left excluding the middle two letters (empty)

2 Traditionalist antique custodian (3,5)

OLD GUARD

Antique - OLD custodian - GUARD

The definition refers to the use of the phrase to describe long standing members of a group resistant to change.

3 Joint where laugh starts and ends (5)

HOUGH

Laugh starts - HO ho ho and ends laUGH

The second of the alternate spellings I mentioned above. More familiar as 'hock' this version is pronounced the same, it's a Scottish variant of the word for a joint on the rear leg of an animal, including a horse. For the non-horsey among us, it's probably most familiar as a joint of meat such as 'ham hock'. I found it surprising that, if you don't count the common miss-pronunciation of 'loch' or 'lough', it seems to be the only word where OUGH represents the sound 'ock' so I had to include it, despite the obscurity!

5 A sin for punishment, to an extent (2,2,3)

IN SO FAR

Anagram, indicated by 'punishment' of A SIN FOR

Insofar also exists but is more usual in America. Another difficult one to define, the extent is defined by whatever follows the 'as' that always follows it.

6 Slope back inside to provide source of nasty smell (3,6)

CAT LITTER

To provide - CATER around slope back - TILT reversed for TLIT

The definition only applies if it's been used I suppose.

7 One who takes interest when pure heart drawn in by exploiter (6)

USURER

Exploiter - USER around pURe heart - the middle two letters

8 Percussion instruments went to the heads of Victorian aristocrats? (2-4)

HI-HATS

Cryptic definition?

I was vaguely aware that the pedal-operated cymbals on a pole that often make up part of a drum kit were called this though I wasn't aware of the abbreviated spelling. It was also used as an uncomplimentary term for the sorts of aristocrats who used to wear top hats and, by extension, anyone who had a high opinion of themselves.

9 Shed in depressing place (6)

SLOUGH

Double definition. When snakes slough their skins they shed them. The depressing place referred to is the slough of despond, not a real location of course but the word place is increasingly used to mean a state of mind. As for the town in Berkshire, never having been there, I cannot comment, despite its reputation.

15 States leaders of North Dakota, Tennessee, edge rivals (2,3,4)

US AND THEM

States - USA Leaders of North Dakota, Tennessee - NDT edge - HEM

17 Swamp annual general meeting in old papers (8)

QUAGMIRE

AGM inside QUIRE - an old unit used for paper, equivalent to a 20th of a ream. 25 sheets apparently. Also more generally, a number of sheets folded together.

18 Wrecks ship carrying madman (8)

SHATTERS

Ship - SS around (carrying) HATTER (one of) the mad characters from Alice in Wonderland.

20 Review uncritical? Nit picking is essential! (7)

CRUCIAL

Anagram, indicated by 'review' of UnCRitICAL having 'picked out' nit.

21 Take top off second Eastern leader (6)

BEHEAD

Second - B (as in B team) Eastern - E Leader - HEAD

For the first, I was thinking of Putin again, who has been photographed shirtless a number of times.

22 Mindset of oddly pasty revolutionary (6)

PSYCHE

Oddly - odd letters from PaStY - and CHE - revolutionary.

23 Audibly prompts actors' lines (6)

QUEUES

Homophone, indicated by 'audibly' Cues.

25 Bulb working, me working (5)

ONION

Working - ON me - I and working - ON again.