

Casper the Commuting Cat

Posted by Peter on 18 January 2010



Casper the commuting cat.

Today we meet a cat called Casper, and we learn about the English verb "to commute".

Let's start with the verb. "Commute" has an interesting history, because its modern meaning is quite different from its original meaning.

Originally, to "commute" meant to exchange one thing for another. It was a boring word and we used it mainly for technical, financial matters. Imagine that you work for the government's tax office. Every day you go to work; you write letters, you fill in forms, you calculate how much tax people have to pay, and you do other interesting things. After 40 years, you retire, and the government gives you a pension. It is possible that you will be able to choose exactly how you want to receive the pension. You can choose to receive a payment every month; or sometimes you can choose to take some money now and receive a smaller monthly payment. This is called "commuting" - you have exchanged part of your regular monthly pension payments for a [lump sum](#) of money.

You are probably asleep by now, or wondering why I am telling you this. But think of someone else who exchanges regular payments for a single payment. Someone who buys a [season ticket](#) on the railways or the buses pays a sum of money now, instead of buying a train or bus ticket every day. At some time in the 20th century, we started to call a person who bought a season ticket a "commuter". And from there, we started to use the word "commute" to mean to travel from your home to work and back again, by any means of transport. Today, we can say "I commute by car". That means, "I travel to work and back by car every day". We can say that a railway station is crowded with commuters - that means that it is full of people travelling to work or back home again. We can say "I commute for 50 miles" or "My commute is 50 miles", and this means that I travel a long way - 50 miles - to go to work every day. If I was a millionaire, I might commute from my home in the south of France to my work in London in my own private aeroplane.

Now that you understand about the word "commute" and how it has changed its meaning, it is time to meet the cat. His name is Casper, and he lives - or rather, he used to live - in Plymouth in the south west of England. Plymouth is famous for its naval [dockyards](#), where military ships are built. Casper used to stand at the bus stop

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outside his home in Plymouth with the other bus passengers. He used to get on the bus and go to sleep on one of the seats. He would travel all the way to the [terminus](#) and then come back again. The bus drivers knew Casper, and made sure that he got off the bus at the right stop. Casper travelled on the buses in Plymouth for over 4 years. People called him "Casper the commuting cat".

Recently, however, and very sadly, Casper was hit by a car during one of his journeys around Plymouth, and he has now died. There is a notice at his bus stop about his death, and flowers. We are all very sad.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=505>,