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Hole-in-the-wall

Professor David Crystal

Hole-in-the-wall is one of those phrases where you get a lot of words hyphenated, if you wrote it down: hole-in-the-wall, being used as a single word, as a noun. "I'm going to the hole-in-the-wall" you might say or "I'm getting some money out of the hole-in-the-wall". Well you can see what it means, it means an automatic cash dispenser – one of those installed in the outside wall of a bank or some other money-giving organisation.

It's British colloquial; it's not used as far as I know in the States, or in Australia, or anywhere, although I wouldn't be surprised if it spread a little bit – always written with hyphens. Very unusual to see phrases of this kind and sentences being used in this way, as single words. But if you listen out for them, you'll find them – especially being used as adjectives. Have you heard people for instance say "he's a very get-up-and-go-person"? Now there's the sentence 'get up and go'. To say a "get-up-and-go-person" means somebody who's got lots of oomph inside them, lots of enthusiasm. Or if I give you a "come-hither-look" – a "come-hither-look": come here – come hither. Another phrase being used as an adjective.

You can try them out as a sort of game. "Who do you think you are?" is a common enough expression – so you can make it an adjective and say "he gave me a who-do-you-think-you-are sort of look". Make it even longer if you want: "he gave me a who-do-you-think-you-are-and-why-are-you-looking-at-me sort of look" – but there is a limit to the length you can make an adjective. Don't go on for too long, you'll run out of breath!



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