



Is our dialect really doomed?

RALPH NICKERSON

IT WAS GOOD TO RECEIVE my *Merry Mawkin* again, with much of interest, and contents to excite the nostalgia of such ex-County exiles as myself.

Although our good old dialect is pretty obviously doomed – how can it be otherwise in times of nationwide media and youth who travel and communicate widely, and who also hate to be seen/heard as ‘diffrent’? – there can be no earthly harm in some of us actively striving to preserve it artificially. Analogous, as I see it, to those stout lads and lasses who do valiant work on restoring and reviving sections of steam-train lines, or those who replant ‘ancient semi-natural’ woodland, or who Morris-dance with all accoutrements and abandon. All such efforts and accomplishments are highly pleasurable to those with a bent that way, and in our fond case the efforts have some linguistic historical value. Anyway, not every English county is so lucky to have its own vernacular as a form of positive social cohesion, and it’s nice to feel a ‘one-ness’ with so many others. Incidentally: would anyone with cartographic skills care to delineate a map of our linguistic boundaries, hazy though these may be in places?

Well within my lifetime (I was born in the ‘Fighting Forties’) our argot has perceptibly changed in some areas. Ida Fenn’s tales, for instance, no longer seem to quite represent today’s pronunciation, in street, field or bar. I may be wrong (as well as distantly displaced), but I’ve not recently heard *meart* for mate, *Tarm* for Tom, *Jimmer* for Jimmy, or *enner* for any. That last simple word ‘any’ nowadays surely shortens to ‘na; as in, ‘Ha’ yer got ‘na onions, Maaster?’ And are there a few notable differences in vocalizations from the Cromer coast to the Waveney valley? That lovely old salutation, ‘Master’ – neither patronising, subservient nor ironic – seemed rare or missing when I last lived up Holkham way.

And a word in passing on that simplest of pronouns: ‘I’. Not, perhaps, to be best represented in print as *Oi* – that IS pure Mummerset! It could

be *Iy*, but is also accurately represented by *O* or even *U!* As in: ‘U’m a-gorn hoom’, or ‘O’ll see how that goo’. Agreed that ‘I’ elides delightfully (as often recorded in the *Mawkin’s* pages), into ‘I’re’: our common version of I’ve is probably unique in the English-speaking world... And don’t we overwork the simple ‘that’! ‘Thass no good doin’ that that way, that that ent.’ As for *roight* – maybe not really accurate for the sound from a Norfolk gob; ‘righ’ would be more common with the typically dropped final ‘t’.

Mind you, representing Norfolk words phonetically, especially with English orthography, is not always straightforward. And there can be more than one pronunciation of the same word. E.g. *hum* or *hoom* for home, *fewl* or *fool* for fool, *spuk* or *spook* for spoke, *blust* or *blaarst* for blast, depending on emphasis. All in all, the *The Merry Mawkin’s* correspondents, at least the living ones, do a lovely job in portraying our lazy, sing-song old dialect.

On a completely different matter, should FOND perhaps adopt a Past Patron, or even Patron Saint? I suggest the late George Borrow, of Dereham Town. Whatever he was or was not – odd, priggish, bigoted, arrogant and much else – he always declared himself first and foremost a Norfolkman. Since he probably also boasted a fair regional accent, I’ve always inclined rather warmly to the old blighter. And for those unfamiliar with his name or doings, enquiry will quite likely prove rewarding: he was of course the premier Friend of true Romany travellers, a linguist extraordinary (who else could learn Manchu in seven months, in Russia from a French dictionary, and then translate the New Testament into that totally alien tongue?), also a boxer, horseman, walker and general athlete. I don’t doubt that the Borrow Society would be glad to hear, cordially and fraternally, if only via their Website, from us FONDlings.

Enough of the proverbial squit, I think. Mind how yer go, all on yer, and keep up the fine work. We appreciate it.



Linguistic equality

PETER TRUDGILL, PRESIDENT OF FOND



THASS VERY DIFFICULT to say exactly how many languages there are in the world. Apart from the purely practical problems of obtainen reliable information about languages from all over the world, theres also the fact that thass very often

impossible to decide whass a separate language and what int. Anyway, there're certainly a few thousand on em. Duren the past several decades, people worken in linguistics ha studied a good proportion of the world's languages – though not as many on em nor in as great detail as they woulda liked. From these studies, that have emerged that there int no linguistic reason for sayen that one language is superior to another. All languages are equally 'good'.

Linguists ha found that all languages are complex systems what're equally valid as a means of communication. Every language meet the communication needs what its speakers ha got in an entirely adequate way, and if these needs change, then the language change with em. In other words, there int no such thing as a 'primitive' language. Languages what are spoke in communities technologically not so advanced as our own int linguistically no different from them what are spoke in the more fully industrialised nations. All the world's languages appear to have evolved to an equivalent stage of development. Languages what're spoke by isolated hill tribes in Papua New Guinea are in every way as structured and complex as English, French and the other European languages. English speakers a-tryen to learn one of them languages might even be tempted to say that that was more complex but that would simply be due to learnen difficulties caused by large differences between the two languages. That appear to linguists that all languages are equally complex

and structured; and they're also no different in their expressive capabilities. There int nothen you can say in one language what you can't express in another.

Thass true of course that languages differ. But they differ only in what they hatta say, not in what they can say. If you're a-spoken German, you hatta specify whether a friend is male (Freund) or female (Freundin). You can't say Freund if you mean a woman, do people will misunderstand you. In English you int obliged to do that because the word friend include both sexes, but you can do it if you want (woman friend; male friend).

The fact that no one language is 'better' than another is important for the place of dialects in our society. Thass because the same thing is equally true of different varieties of the same language. Just as there int no linguistic reason for arguen that Gaelic is superior to Chinese, or that French is more logical than English, so no English dialect can't be claimed to be linguistically superior nor inferior to another. All English dialects are equally complex, structured and valid linguistic systems. There int no linguistic evidence whatsoever for suggesten that one dialect is more 'expressive' or 'logical' than any other, nor for postulaten that there're 'primitive', 'inadequate' or 'debased' English dialects. Some people here in Norfolk reckon that our dialect is more 'expressive' than other dialects. That int! We're very fond on it, of course, but that int the same thing. But Norfolk int no less expressive than other dialects neither. There int no subject you can talk or write about in Standard English what you cant talk nor write about in the Norfolk dialect as well, if thass what you want to do – like what I ha tried to show here.

*Discover more about our dialect in Peter Trudgill's book, **The Norfolk Dialect**, as he takes a look at the linguistic history of Norfolk. A5 paperback of 104 pages with 24 illustrations, 18 in colour. Price: £8.95. ISBN: 0 946148 63 5.*



A paintun for a pound!

JEAN EAGLEN

AS YOU WILL KNOW, that gal Tina Chamberlain can alust mearke us larf and this little ow poem have done that many times. Ull tell ya how that happened.

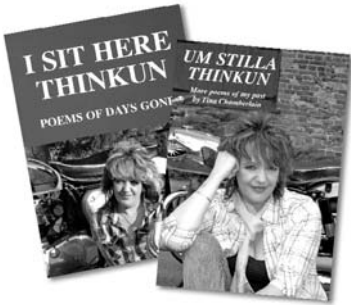
I went into a Charity Shop in Dereham, lookun for a jacket, I found a lovely one in there and as I had a pound coin in my hand I noticed a lovely little paintun on the wall behind the till. I asked the gal a serving if I could have a look the frame and asked how much it was. What a surprise...it was only a pound!

Then I fell about laughing as I told Tina all about it that evening and she said... "Blast me, Jean, I feel a poem a coming on."

And as you can see, she wrote this for me.

It has got a happy ending though. The family who I painted it for on a birthday card had down-sized their home and had sent some items to help Charity, but now want it back... "Cos thus wuth a lot more now".

Laughter really is the best medicine.



MORE POETRY BY TINA – THE 'PAM AYRES' OF NORFOLK!

I Sit Here Thinkun ISBN: 0 900616 75 X
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Um Stilla Thinkun ISBN: 978 0 900616 80 8
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Available from FOND; also from *The Book Fountain*, Wymondham, *J & C Books*, Watton, *Chambers of Dereham*, and *The Holt Bookshop* in Holt.

THE PAINTING ON THE WALL

By Tina Chamberlain

*Gal Jean she loves ta paint,
Art classes are a hobby,
Har paintings hang around har house,
From the bathroom to the lobby.*

*I have a lovely painting
She give me, of a shed,
She knew I loved that sort a thing,
As offten I had said.*

*One day she went to Dereham,
And couldn't help but stop
Ta look inside fa bargains,
At the little Charity shop.*

*She stood there by the counter,
An a painting caught her eye,
Of a lovely cockerel and a hin
And she asked, "How much to buy?"*

*The lady turned and, from the wall,
The painting she did pass,
She said, "It's yours, dear, for a pound,
It's original and class."*

*Gal Jean she studied for a while,
The painting looked 'Official',
But looking closer at the edge,
She noticed an initial.*

*She started then to laugh,
As she could clearly see,
The corner of the painting,
Where SHE had wrote J. E.*

*So, if you need investments,
Do you think ahid,
And buy a J. E. painting,
'Cos thus wuth more than a quid.*





FOND AGM 2011

ROSEMARY COOPER

MEMBERS ASSEMBLED IN Lincoln Hall at Hingham on Sunday 27 November received a warm welcome from the chairman, Norman Hart, who said – having signed last year’s minutes – he felt more relaxed at this meeting compared to last year. Reporting visits to various radio stations in the county, he highlighted the apology received from the BBC for the dialect portrayed in a play based in Norwich. He also said that there had been many visits to events with the display as well as the opportunity to talk to groups. The joint event with the Friends of Gressenhall was a great success, he continued, and it was hoped to repeat it in 2012. Norman then spoke of the trip to Louth for the National Dialect Conference, which had been really enjoyable and there had been a good exchange of ideas with other societies.

The chairman then commended Diss High School for including six to seven lessons on the dialect in their syllabus for eleven-year-olds, and then thanked the rest of the committee for their work and making his chairmanship enjoyable.

The book by Robin Limmer, *Norfolk Dialect and its Friends*, has been re-printed and Norman commended it to the assembly. He also spoke of the launch of Keith Skipper’s new book *Come Yew On, Tergether!* which was held at Jarrolds and at which FOND took part.

Rosemary’s report echoed his, with the addition of a mention of the Trosher competition which had now been marked, and the purchase of a new PA system for meetings and Dews.

Brenda Bizzell gave members the figures to date, saying we had no members in NR22, NR23 or NR32, however there are sixteen in NR9 which includes Hingham.

Janet Woodhouse followed with the state of our finances. Our account balance at 31 October was £4,233.36. Anyone wanting a copy of the accounts should contact Janet.

Ashley gave his Newsletter/Web report thanking all the contributors to the magazine. He said our website had an average of 150 hits per day, and had recently seen a 4% increase.



PHOTO: ALAN COOPER

Diana Rackham was voted on the FOND committee.

Jean Eaglen read Stewart Orr’s report, in which he said he was grateful to Jean for providing the recordings. There are now sixty-four separate recordings with twenty-three having been done this year. At this point Norman thanked Jean as she is the only person at present collecting the dialect for us.

The election followed, with two changes: John Austren came off the committee and Diana Rackham was voted on. Janet Woodhouse said this would be her last year and that the auditor was prepared to remain for another year.

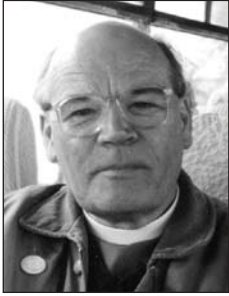
An amendment and addition to the constitution were passed. The meeting then agreed that members should gain entry to Dews for £1 less than non-members. Liza Austren welcomed Diana to the FOND committee and Ted said he looked forward to working with Diana, as she had reduced the average age of the committee quite considerably. Norman ended the meeting by thanking John Austren for all his work.

After the break for tea and a chat Vera Youngman entertained the audience with her tales of being a lady’s maid at the age of sixteen in 1938. There were several questions for her about her life then, and the houses and castles she had stayed at. Norman then thanked everyone for coming and looked forward to seeing them at the pantomime in January.



Them ole narsery roimes

CANON PETER NICHOLSON



AS OI TOLD YEW in the larst *Mawkin* Oi kin well rememba moi mother singin' all them ole narsery roimes to me, Oi kin, so Oi reckon yew'd hooly like t'hare sum onnem, wun't yew?

Now Oi ent a-sayin' Oi wuz wud parfick

arter orl these hare yares an', anyhows, Oi reckon yew're hard orl onnem afore. So Oi reckon that'd hooly be a masterous idear to bringum up ter dearte, so I're translearted sum onnem inta our Norfolk dialect, tergether, an' hare's the fust tew.

HUMPTY DUMPTY

Humpty Dumpty set on a wall,
That belonged to the squire of Ingham Old Hall.
The squire himself was out at the wicket,
As Humpty looked down on the great game of cricket.
He say: "Wer, cor blast, Oi'd loike summa that,"
So he aksed whether he could go hev a bat.
The squire he say: "No – 'coarse yew're ony an egg,
But go you and field out at backward short leg."
The batsman hit out and the ball cam Hump's way,
And being an egg he just rolled it away.
The umpire, he say: "Cum yew stand longer me,
An' yew can do umpire whoile Oi go ter tea."
The bowler flew by with a hell of a roar,
And Hump gev the squire: "Out, plumb leg before!"
The squire he did haller: "Yew'll hev a grearte fall,
If yew dare cum agin and set on *moi* wall!"

Oi nearly din't roit this coarse Oi went ter the Hampshire v. Middlesex Twetty-Twetty and a batsman hit a six wot landed a foot or two away from moi skull. Shan't set in that chair ner more!

OLE WOMAN WHO LIVED IN A SHOE

There wuz an old woman who lived in a shoe,
She had a pet owl wot go "Twitter-ter-woo",
She din't loike a bard wot went onter Twitter,
'Coarse she's on Fearcebook and say thass much better.

Reception in shoes, well that en't werry great,
So to get things ter boot up she hev a long wait.
The rhyme thet do say she had children galore,
With no space on har hard disk she carn't hev ner more.

But arter she'd hed about five, six or seven,
She upped from XP onter Microsoft Seven.
And then she gev barth ter a gal and a boy,
And with them in the shoe there woon't werry much joy.

So ter mearke extra room for a new single bed,
She scrapped har machine, bought a laptop instead.

And now that ole owl wot go "Twitter-ter-woo",
Can come in all day and be with har too.

I batter explain to them wot en't bard watchers that owls hunt at noit. So yew see they're atoom duren the day. I're bin a-wunderin' how they see them there voles in the dark. Hatter go ter Specsearvers agin, or ask Bill Oddie – he know!

The local vicar was delivering his parish magazines around the village when he let some of them fall on the wet path. Quickly gathering them up, he wrapped them in his handkerchief to dry out, and continued on his way holding the bundle in his hand.

On the way around the village he heard some roadmen using bad language.

"Do you know Satan, my man? he asked, waving the bundle of magazines at him.

"No," came the reply, "but Oi'll ax moi mearte. Harry, dew yew know Seartun?"

"Carnt sear Oi dew," he replied, "Why?"
"Well, the wicar hare hev got his dinner!"