



The Northumbrian Language Society



PATRON: His Grace the Duke of Northumberland.

PRESIDENT: Hon. Aldmn. Mrs. E. Mitchell, O.B.E., M.A..

Newsletter 18

A SIGNIFICANT NORTHUMBRIAN LANGUAGE EVENT.

The Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering Saturday afternoon session is now a very substantial event devoted to Northumberland and its historic language. It is held on 17th April this year from 1.30 p.m. at Collingwood House, Oldgate (ahint the Clock Toowoer, hinnies). It begins with the "Fine Northumbrian Speech" recitation competition, followed by the Story Telling (stories set in Northumberland, dialect as appropriate) competition, and it concludes with the Dialect Recital, when entries to the Gathering's Northumbrian verse and prose writing competitions (judged beforehand) are read by the entrants or deputies. During the Recital, all the writing and composing results are announced, and awards are presented.

The Newcastle Branch of our Society intends to come to the session, and it should, indeed, interest the Society membership generally, not to mention those benighted folk who wonder vaguely what "this Northumbrian" is!

To compete in Golden Speech or Story Telling, you simply fill in an entry form in advance or at the door before your competition's judging begins. There is no entry fee, but you do, like the audience, need a Saturday afternoon all-venue ticket (£1; OAP/UB40/Child 60p). Here are the two competitions' rules:-

C18: FINE NORTHUMBRIAN SPEECH: entry (one only per entrant), a recital of up to 4 minutes' duration, of all or part of any piece of Northumbrian verse or prose, by any writer; entrants to supply judge with a copy of the text before reciting; judged on understanding of text, oral delivery, & quality & consis-

tency of the Northumbrian accents & vocabulary. Entrants are recommended to choose worthy texts, rich in Northumbrian words, expressions and character. District dialects of the language are, of course, accepted, preferably identified for the audience..

C22: STORY TELLING: entry (one per entrant), a story set in Northumberland; the entrant's/another's/traditional; dialect as appropriate; up to 5 minutes' duration; judged on presentation, atmosphere, character & dialect quality.

DO HAVE A SHOT, whatever your hopes of winning! You will be helping to keep Northumbrian alive and well...

MOODY'S "MID-NORTHUMBERLAND DIALECT."

Our gallant allies, Mr. & Mrs. Grahame Binless, are nearing the end of the marathon task they took on--rendering the 600-odd pages of Thomas Moody's book into neat word-processor-ese. Your Chairman, meanwhile, is plodding towards completing the proof-reading of the first volume's new form. This is rather more time-taking than expected, because, Moody, writing off and on over years, tended to forget how he had arranged things previously, e.g. sub-dividing 1-2-3, a-b-c, and i-ii-iii are constantly and misleadingly exchanged. However, the intrinsic interest of the text, the examples quoted, and Moody's own anecdotes are ever interesting.

Meanwhile, contact has been made with the County Library, which has a float for book printing, repaid from the sales, and a Northumbrian exile in the Deep South, a book agent, has volunteered to help find sponsors.

THE PLESSEY POULTIGGERY.

Driving past daily over 30 years, I have always been intrigued by the odd building, part tower, part dovecot, by Plessey Checks roundabout. Only the other day did Geoffrey Ridley (of Hexham Branch) ring up to mention its odder identity as a hen plus pig house, the former upstairs, the latter below --and warming the birds upstairs, whose droppings added to the menu downstairs, he added. Now "The Journal" has featured it, with the land agent's comment that foxes avoid pigs and so the hens were safe from attack.

The name is evidently a blend of "poultry" and "piggery". Northumbrian has examples of such blendings, to describe a new mixed idea, but we cannot claim this one unless it transpires that the concocted word is unknown elsewhere. The building is Grade 2 Listed and about 150 years old.

NOTICE OF 1993 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

TO ALL MEMBERS:

You are cordially invited to the 1993 Annual Meeting, to be held at 7.15 p.m. on Saturday 1st May at the White Swan in Newgate St., Morpeth. There is parking in Back Riggs, and a covered way from the rear of T. & G. Allan Ltd.'s shop brings you to Newgate St. where you turn left. A longer walk is from the car park behind the Town Hall.

AGENDA.

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of 1992 Annual Meeting.
3. Executive's Report for 1992-3.
4. Treasurer's Report for 1992-3.
5. Election of Officers:
 - a) PRESIDENT (1992-3, Mrs. E. Mitchell O.B.E.)
 - b) VICE-PRESIDENT (1992-3, Mrs. Janet Brown).
 - c) CHAIRMAN (Mr. R. Bibby).
 - d) VICE-CHAIRMAN (the late Mr. J. Holland).
 - e) SECRETARY (Mrs. K.M. Bibby-Wilson).
 - f) TREASURER (Miss H. Dickson).
 - g) BIBLIOGRAPHER (Mr. G. Wallace).
 - h) HON. AUDITOR (Mr. T.H. Horne).
6. Election of Executive Committee (1992-3, Mesdames J. Brown, A. Dickie; Messrs. C. Jackson, G. Johnson of Hexham Branch, B. Robinson of Newcastle Branch; with Mrs. V. McLean, co-opted member).
7. Other Elections:
 - a) FELLOWS OF THE SOCIETY (no proposals have been received)
 - b) HON. LIFE PAST PRESIDENTS.
 - c) HON. PAST VICE-PRESIDENTS.
 - c) HON. LIFE MEMBERS.
8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

THE LATE JOE HOLLAND, OUR VICE-CHAIRMAN.

With great regret we report the death on 13th February of that good friend of the Society, after some weeks of difficulties and repeated stays in hospital. His courage and patience were very evident, but most of us will recall him as an engaging, ever-humorous companion, never without a joke or a cogent anecdote about the language or life in Northumberland. Newcastle Branch hopes, with the co-operation of Joe's son, Jim, to publish the verse and prose writings of this excellent man.

THE NINTH REED SUPPER.

Again we celebrate the life and work of the late Fred Reed F.N.L.S., poet, student and advocate of the Northumbrian language during his long life. This year we must do so on the day after his birthday, because two of our officers have to report on the Gathering and magazine at the parent body's annual meeting on the birthday.

The Supper takes place on Saturday 1st May, at about 8.15 p.m., after the Annual Meeting, at the White Swan, Morpeth (see Annual Meeting information in this Newsletter).

PLEASE send your **TICKET APPLICATION FORM** and **PAYMENT** (£3.50p per person) as soon as possible. It can include family and friends, but there is, of course, a seating limit. **CLOSING DATE** (which may be too late!): THURSDAY 29TH APRIL. Application Forms received near that date, may be too late for tickets by post, & such tickets will be **HELD AT DOOR**. If you prefer this procedure, **TICK THE BOX** on the Application Form.

THE REED SUPPER PROGRAMME.

- * Peypin in the Muckle Greet Stotty Cyek.
- * Sarrimoanyil Forst Hack bi the Preseedint, an' thi Stotty Cyek Weesh.
- * Tradeesshinal Suppor o' Peys an' Peas, Stotty an' Caffee.
- * Address ti the Muckle Greet Stotty bi Maistor Bob Lyon.
- * Ripley on eets bihaaf bi Maistriss Jane Smailes.
- * Address ti the Baard, wor ain Fred Reed, bi A.N. Other.
(STOP PRESS.)
- * Ripley on hees bihaaf bi ees daaghtor, Bernadene Familton.
- * Bits an' Pieces, hwin aal willin is axed ti hoy in bits o' varse, tyales, sangs an' owt else thit entortyains aal gud Northumbrians.
- * Fred Reed's Bennydikshin.

AND ESPECIALLY AT YORK.

John de Trevisa, 14th century West Country writer, stated: "Al the longage of the Northumbres, and specialych at ork [York], ys so scharp, slytting [strident] and frotynge [grating], and unschape [uncoüth], that we Souperon [Southern] men may that longage [scarcely] vunderstonde [understand]."

This early generalization is denied by that "specialych". If the raucous tones he complained of were worst at York, they had to be Yorkshire's Danish-Anglian, not Northumberland's An-

glian, famously pleasant to the ear! His "Northumbres" were Yorkshire folk, not Northerners in general.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.

We may not seem to spend very much, but we are saving up towards publishing Moody's notable mid-Northumbrian dialect book, as well as "Mike an' Moas", and even one newsletter costs a pretty penny!

Subscriptions (£2) fall due on 1st April annually. You may already have paid yours for 1993-4 direct to the Treasurer or via your Branch Treasurer and will have your new Membership Card now or soon. ■ If you haven't, you can pay when ordering your Reed Supper ticket(s) with the enclosed form. ■ If you are missing the Supper but attending the A.G.M., you can pay the Treasurer then. ■ If you must miss both, please post your subscription to the Society or Branch Treasurer (using the supper form to save writing a letter).

The Society Treasurer is Miss H. Dickson, 95 Rosalind St., Ashington NE63 9BW (tel 811697).

Branch members must be Society members, and a Branch may have its own subscription or a meeting charge to defray costs. A Society member may attend any Branch meeting, paying the meeting charge for that meeting or the Branch subscription for several meetings to come.

FISHERFOLK'S TRADITIONAL RHYME.

"Me uncle died a month ago an' left me aal his riches,
A wooden leg, a feather bed an' a pair o' leather britches,
A coffee pot wi'oot a spoot, a jug wi'oot a han'le,
A baccy box wi'oot a lid an' a haaf a faathin can'le."

—William Sampson.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The once-successful Yule Meet having failed several times to attract enough members in mid-winter, the Executive is now considering a Kern Meet in September, possibly with two speakers in the afternoon, a tea of broth and stotty, and an evening barn dance. Two halls in Morpeth and Stannington Community Centre are short-listed venues.

If you have any reaction for or against this plan, or a wish to have the December Yule Meet, or January Hogmanay Howf (both evening affairs), tried again, please note down your view on the back of the enclosed Reed Supper ticket form.

Thank you for this help!

BRAIN-WASHING; or, WHO KIDS WHOM?

If Dr. Goebbels had ever set out to destabilize the Northumberland community, he would have done exactly the things that are being done in this half-century. In 1974, dotty "Tyne & Wear" cut off Northumberland's legs at the knees. The Tourist Board, wildly image-building at any cost, resurrected that honoured old name, "Northumbria" for one slice only of the whole. This device was inaccurately aped by other simple minded image builders, so that there are now 8 "Northumbrias"--you hear the word, you have a choice of definitions. In the same way, "the North", "the North-East" and "the region" are titles bandied about by all and sundry without any agreement as to their meanings. So much for language precision. Enraged by this, several sales-seeking authors and many more unthinkingly duped innocents now seek to extend 'Geordieland' from its true area, Tyneside, to embrace Northumberland, Durham, Cleveland and even Cumbria!

The Prime Minister and other Westminster spokesmen had declared that traditional counties should be restored, but the Boundary Commission is carefully considering County Durham's boundaries now, and Northumberland's another time, so that on neither occasion can it deal with getting rid of Tyne & Wear.

There is no doubt that Traditional Northumberland, the Tweed-Tyneside heartland of Old Northumbria, is a genuine community occupying a genuine region, in which its Angle-Northumbrian language, culture and character were developed uniquely and handsomely through 13½ long centuries, in contrast with the areas to south and north, heavily influenced by incoming Danes, Norse, Normans and Scots. Such fundamental truths we Northumbrians know: others, "they", do not.

The only hope of remedying this is to bombard Mr. Major, the most prominent person to propose the return of traditional counties (at the Tory conference), with many letters demanding the abolition of Tyne & Wear County. Minus its departed council, it has no reason to exist. Its work is done by the Metropolitan Boroughs and some Boards. Its area is just as well described as that of those Boroughs.

There is no real quarrel with Newcastle and North Tyneside Metropolitan Boroughs' survival--their names are Northumbrian enough--ideally with "in Northumberland" in their names. It is "Tyne & Wear" that so inexcusably attacks literacy, history, identity and community values.

You know Mr. Major's address--who doesn't? PLEASE DO WRITE IN EARNEST COMPLAINT, and DO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN, whenever it occurs to you, for what seems to count is the number of letters received. Northumberland is worth no end of 18p stamps!

Lastly, from *The Last Land*:-

*"Northumbria"'s a deed land,
An' "Teyne an' Weeeor"'s a nowt-land:
But huz aal knaa wor true land,
Fra Tweed ti Teyne, wor hyame-land.*

*Northumborland, thi last land,
Thi greet land, thi grand land,
Thi hyame-land, thi hairt-land,
Wor true an' weel-luvd ain land.*

—R.B.

*****KS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-BOOKS-B*****

■ A few copies remain of "**Chevy Chase**", the limited facsimile edition of Thompson's handwritten and illustrated 500th anniversary book of Battle of Otterburn ballads. Details: Morpeth 513308.

■ You may not know that "**Northumbriana**" magazine now formally represents the interests of the Society as well as of Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering--two allies in preserving and enriching the heritage and culture of True Northumberland (Tweed-Tyneside). Much in this voluntary magazine (est. 1975) concerns the Northumbrian language and its on-going literature, including the long-running Survey into the "health" and origins of Northumbrian words and their district dialects. Appearing half yearly, the magazine can be had from certain kindly shops, or postally by advance subscription. Ring Morpeth 513308 for information.

■ One new book has some superb colour photographs of its subject, "**Castles of Northumbria**", but oh! for that famous happy orth of tar! Why spoil its reputation with that infective "Northumbria"? It ranges far and near over the castles of "Northumberland" and "Tyne & Wear" (not into Durham, not as far as Cleveland, wherever that is)--over the castles of Traditional Northumberland, in short--Tweed to Tyne. Why not simply and accurately call it "Castles of Northumberland"--Northumberland being so very well known as "the County of Castles"?

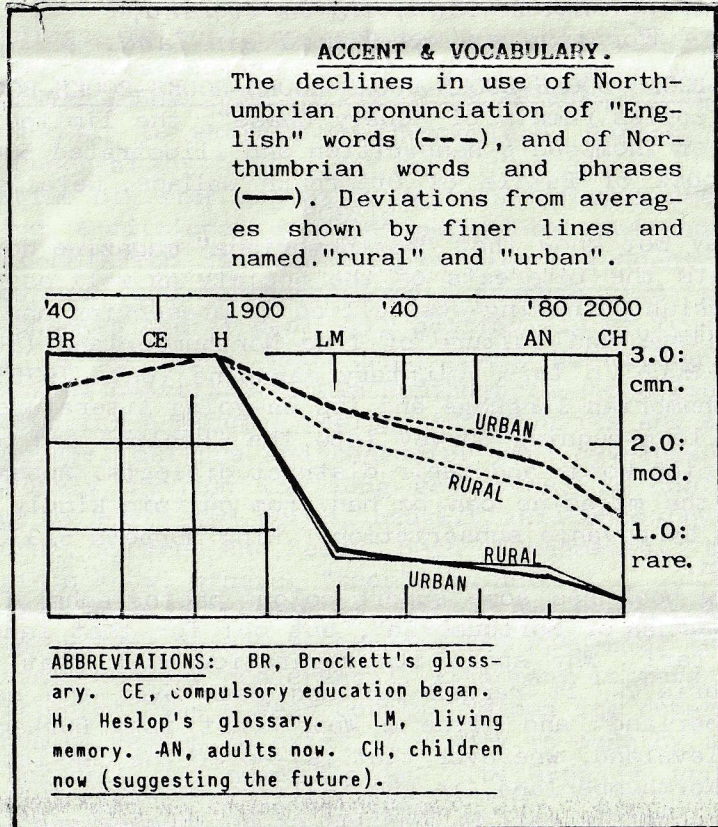
How can so many think Anglo-Latin "Northumbria" is more romantic and impressive a name than "Northumberland" when it ends with a bray, whereas the poet could rightly speak of the

"drums and trumpets" of Northumberland's name?

DECLINE BUT NOT, WE TRUST, FALL.

Members who joined some years ago may never have seen the graph below in the Society's three-fold publicity leaflet. The graph is based on the first 50 items in the "Northumbriana" Northumbrian language survey, which gets reports from various districts on the survival and health of words in living memory, amongst present adults and amongst children. The graph is salutary in demonstrating the decline, hastening latterly, of Northumbrian vocabulary and accents. This we hope to halt and reverse.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH, 7.30 p.m.: APRIL 14, Sue Newman & Carol Hill, songsters. MAY 12, Jean Crocker on Books.



HEXHAM BRANCH, 7 p.m.: APRIL 22, Liz Sobell on Beamish Museum and more. JUNE 4, Isabella Everitt, retired headmistress from colliery area.

NOTES. Cmn = common; Mod. = moderate. Many words now score Never or Unknown, and very very few Always. Cheap newspapers and free libraries added to compulsory education's influence early this century, and radio/television/"mobility"/social climbing/careerism followed suit.