



# The Northumbrian Language Society



PATRON: His Grace the Duke of Northumberland.

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

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## Newsletter 20

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### Newsletters for the future.

At the November Executive meeting, our newsletters were discussed and suggestions approved. So now---

- a) We seek an **editor**, just that, not necessarily equipped and willing to word-process newsletters. The hard-pressed Bibbys think that that work can be managed for more frequent newsletters, if only an editor is assembling and readying the contents, pursuing contributors etc.. Any takers, if only experimentally?
- b) We hope for **news from the Branches** regularly in addition to their programmes, from the secretaries or chosen correspondents.
- c) We hope too for **queries and anecdotes** from Society members. "Northumbriana" magazine too is interested in such items to do with the Northumbrian language.
- d) Free **personal advertisements** from members can be published, but a charge would be right for commercial insertions.

Your "contact" about any of these, until we have an editor, is R. Bibby, Westgate House, Dogger Bank, Morpeth, NE61 1RF; (0670) 513308.

### Kern Supper Kerncelled (ugh!)

The search for another Society function in the year to match the Reed Supper goes on. Christmas Party, Hogmanay party and now Kern Supper have failed for lack of support.. The tireless Executive now aims at either a Saturday afternoon function in a pub



not demanding a room rent, or else a picnic by bus. Puzzle: to find and fix the right weather for the latter.

### **"Max und Moritz" larn to taalk propor.**

They are the anti-heroes of the 19th century classic German children's cautionary tale, in verse and copiously illustrated with drawings by the author, Wilhelm Busch. Old as the book is, the story is contemporary, for the two young charmers play havoc in the village with their skylarks, until at length their campaign recoils upon them and they go through the mill literally and disastrously.

A German professor, Manfred Gortlach of Heidelberg University, is publishing the story in umpteen languages and dialects over the years, and, when it came to English dialects, it fell to our Chairman to supply the Northumbrian version---the same verse form, the same period and rural village setting and story-line, but in Northumbrian character, decided he.

And so, a decade later, "*Northumbriana*", on behalf of our Society, publishes "*Meyk an' Moas*", as a re-introduction to the older, richer mid-Northumbrian of before the Great Erosion of the 20th century, e.g.

*"TOSHORI Greet fond bowdikeyte!*

*Aa'll larn ye hwaat's hrang, hwaat's hreyt"*

*Ivry ward she says shi brays*

*Toshor i' maist painfu' ways*

*Wi a muckle sarvin spyun,*

*Hweyle ee hools the hwoa-ul hoose dyun. . ."*

"*Bowdikeyte, brays, moidart, blai-it, yell-can, flannen*" and the like need not discourage readers. Copious footnotes interpret all such words for much less experienced readers than Society members. The unusual attempt to rationalize Northumbrian spelling, so that it more clearly indicates the richer, older pronunciation, in hope of its revival, is not overwhelming. Indeed, it concentrates on the "flying full-stop", a reminder to burr the "r" in good Northumbrian style, and the "flying apostrophe" which signposts the tongue over the fascinating Northumbrian "double vowel" (e.g. *cai'art* for "cai-art" for "cart").

The book is being got to bookshops and news shops, notably those that stock *Northumbriana*, as widely and quickly as possible, much hampered by winter. To learn which shops stock or may stock the book, ring Morpeth (0670) 513308 (though not always is someone in to answer). It costs around £3 in shops or at Westgate House, or £3.45 inclusive (U.K) by post from Westgate House (cheques to "Northumbriana"). It has 50 pages of verse and footnotes, numerous Butsch drawings, and further introductory pages.

### **Other Language Books in the Offing.**

**Joe Holland's Writings.** It is likely now that the Society's memorial volume will concentrate on the unpublished writings, since another new volume, being compiled by Miss Jean Crocker, will include much of Joe's work previously published in the University booklets. Our Vice-President, Mrs. Janet Brown, may be able to help with the word processing, now that her long stint researching the war memorials of Northumberland is in its late stages.

**Moody's "Mid-Northumbrian Dialect"** continues through the word-processing mill with the Binlesses.

**Dr. Hull's "Tyneside Glossary"** and his notes from the *Vasculum* periodical have now been photo-copied, and need next to be word-processed, to appear after the Moody book.

### **Cassette Tapes.**

"Newsletter" 17 told you about "**The Canniest Place on Eorth**", the first cassette of Robert Allen, "The Bard of Bellingham". It has sold merrily and rightly since at £6, at some shops and at the Glebe House, Bellingham NE48 2JS, or £6.50 by post from the Glebe House. Only a few remain of this treasure (a handful at Westgate House also).

It is timely that Robert's second cassette is now on sale at the places mentioned above. It is called "**Ridin' High**", and price and postage are as before. Again this man's delightful verse springs into life and leads the listener to and fro across North Tynedale and the dale farmer's calendar. That immortal bout of weather cynicism, "*Spring in Redesdale*", is there, large as life and



ten times more enlivening. You may buy this cassette for Christmas, but you'll listen to it for life. One verse from that "Spring":

*"Ye'll know it's spring i' Redesdale 'cos ye'll nivvor see the sun,  
The shephord's boots is leakin', hes collie winnit run,  
The corbies laff thor heids off 'cos thore's wattor i' hes gun,  
The spring hes sprung."*

It is planned to make a cassette of the whole script of "**Meyk an' Moas**" eventually, for sale. One was made before for the German editor, but only in an amateur way for his purposes.

### **In Unexpected Places.**

**Atomy**, good Northumbrian for a skeleton or a very thin person, turns up in Ngaio Marsh's thriller, *Black Ashes Painted*, thus: "a mere shadow, a meagre atomy." Our Survey long ago reported its appearance in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Oxford Eng. Dictionary dates its skeleton meaning from 1728 and its very thin meaning from Shakespeare's times. Northumbrians' part was not to invent these off-beat meanings, but to keep them alive in our splendid isolation.

**Mort**, Northumbrian-Romany (heard in certain places) for a woman, appears in G.M. Frazer's *Flashman in the Charge*, but then some Romany words have broken loose like that.

**Barfin**, a horse's collar, is there in James Heriot's *Let Sleeping Vets Lie*: "the barfins and bridles hanging there on the stalls". It is one of Brockett's and Heslop's several variants of the word *barkham* (Northumbriana 29) or *bargham* (1475--O.E.D.)

**Hit**, the redoubtable Northumbrian form of "it"; is much older than many might expect. It is there in all its glory in 14th century Northumbrian *Cursor Mundi*. Northumbrians do not drop "h" or add "h" incorrectly, unlike Yorkshire folk and others, but they not only held on to the Anglo-Saxon "hl-", "hr-" and "hw-" hwords quite hrightly, but they invented the fierce Northumbrian "h" which, hand in hand with "r", created the Northumbrian burr.

**Tidemark**. How many generations of Northumbrian children have been warned about the tell-tale border on the back of the neck? How far does this usage of the word spread---is it ours alone or used everywhere? The O.E.D. knows only the tidemark on a

beach or a river bank.

### **News from the Branches.**

**HEXHAM** next meets on Friday 4th February at 7.30 for the Branch annual meeting and a session with the Survey led by Mrs. Sinkenson (Priestpopple House). Secretary, George Johnson, 0434-605413.

**NEWCASTLE** has its Christmas Party on 8th December at 7.30 at Mrs. Smailes' home, and its next normal meeting on Wednesday 12th January at Spital Tongues Community Centre. Secretary, George Wallace, 091-2583105.

**MORPETH?** Preliminary enquiries suggest that this Branch might well be revived, and a meeting is to be arranged.

**NUMBERS.** Visiting the present branches suggests that an appeal to existing Branch members, and to other Society members within reach, to attend, would be most helpful to Branch, Society and the Cause. Sometimes attendance can be embarrassingly low especially if the speaker or singer has travelled far, or made time for us with difficulty. Do try to attend, please! **Non-members** of the Society can attend a branch meeting once, to "taste the waters", and this and/or an occasional special Open Night, can open the door to advertising the Branch's existence and meetings.

### **Chrismus Shoppin 1988.**

*Yi cut your tabs, yor beeior, yor bets;*

*Yi sell yor thord-best whippit;*

*Yi cash yor last feyve Preemyum Bernds:*

*Yor duds bi noo's decripit.*

*Yor bank-man's heydin iv ees vaalt,*

*Wi banknotes iv ees eeors:*

*"Nee owerdraft, nee credeet caards,*

*Nee mair, nee nowt, frim heeor!"*

*Yi prow! yi push, yi sorch, yi rush;*

*Y'or frenzied, fond an' frantic.*

*Yor futwaalk's corybantic;*

*Yi hoy yorsel inti thi croods,*



Yi canna wait fa leefts;  
Yor eyes aare whorlin i' yor heed  
Ti spot yor Chrismus geefts.

This fa Horsel un' yon fa Wor Belle,  
But nowt at aa' fa yung Glad---  
Wad yon dee fa---? Na, thi varry eydeeor!  
An' yon theeng's aal wrang fa thi lad. . .  
Thor's nowt thi wad waant thi'v not had afore,  
Ixcpt far whaat aa caan't afford:  
But theengs aa must feynd or gan oota me meynd,  
An' me nyem'll becum a beyward. . .

Ixcuse us , miss,whaativvor's this?  
Wad it appeal ti lasses?  
Why thon---whaativvor it meyght be. . .  
Ya reet---aa need new glasses---  
Though whee'd've thowt a nylon nowt---  
Whey, nivvor meynd; aa'm laggin  
Wi haalf thi fam'ly still ti dee,  
An' aal me brainwaves claggin. . .

Spyace gyems, dollies, gyen fra thi screen;  
An' hallidaa treeps tek thor torn;  
Thi last' uv thi shops hes fassind its doo-ors---  
Forr ee it's a bit leyke thi daawn!  
Yi shut yor ain doo-or an' clash in thi bowlt,  
An' knaa thit yi've shot yor ain tee---  
Caz nowt cin be dyun noo thit hesn't been dyun,  
An' fa gud or fa ill, let it be!

Roland Bibby.

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**A Happy Christmas and a Splendid  
New Year to all members and  
families!**