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The Merry Mawkin

No.1

OUR FOND WELCOME IS TINGED WITH SADNESS

Welcome to the first edition of *The Merry Mawkin*, official newsletter of Friends of Norfolk Dialect and an important strand in our survival campaign.

It is a proud occasion tinged with sadness, however, following the sudden death a few days before Christmas of Terry Davy. He played a key role in setting up this organisation and had taken on with relish the job of newsletter editor. Indeed, his impressive grasp of all the latest technology and reputation as an outstanding local publisher made him a natural choice for the post.

Terry was busy preparing our first newsletter when he died of a heart attack at the tragically early age of 59. Obviously, that threw a host of FOND hopes into disarray, not least his edition planned for a bumper launch in mid-January. Still, with the organisation officially coming into being last October, the officers felt it appropriate to share this abbreviated update of news and views before our first big social gathering in March. It is a far less ambitious venture than envisaged - but it arrives with a firm promise of richer fare to come!

We are grateful to another well-known figure on the local publishing scene, Jim Baldwin of Fakenham, for stepping in as "emergency editor", a task he accepted out of respect for Terry's memory as well as providing a mark of

his own backing for our precious vernacula. As the newsletter gets bigger and bolder, we want to extend the debate as widely as possible, not to the point of embracing views from all places with a similar pride in ploughing individual furrows. We know support for Norfolk tongue stretches way beyond "charming anachronism" level and is confined to the indigenous population. newcomers and visitors alike will be invited to underline their keen interest by shaking hands with *The Merry Mawkin*.

Social events with genuine home-made entertainment will be clearly signposted, with all publications with a dialect flavour can guarantee close attention in the newsletter. We also hope to offer a service to enthusiasts looking for certain local books and articles.

Many other ways of reflecting and galvanising support for the Norfolk dialect are bound to emerge as FOND membership flourishes and the gospel spreads. No doubt, many exiles take advantage of the Internet to keep in touch and share their views. That's all to come. In the meantime, let us remember with gratitude the part Terry Davy played in setting up FOND especially with his work on our draft constitution. He helped guide us carefully through it - an onerous task but necessary to put us on a proper footing.

DIVERSITY THE SPICE OF DIALECT LIFE

FOND President Peter Trudgill, born and brought up in Norwich, is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. A figure of international repute in his field, he sends this presidential message

The formation of FOND is a cause for considerable satisfaction. Some parts of Britain, such as Yorkshire, have had societies dedicated to the study, celebration and conservation of their local dialects for well over 100 years. In Norfolk we prefer to take our time and think things over before we take action.

You can just imagine it - a meeting in Yaxham in 1899: "Hang yew on a minute, Boy Keith. We'll hatter think this over a bit. Thass a good idea, but we don't watta do nothin too hasty." Well, we have finally got round to it, and a very good thing it is too. One of the biggest cultural catastrophes facing the modern world is the loss of languages. Some estimates suggest that as many as 90 per cent of the 6000 or so languages in the world are in danger of extinction in the next 100 years. Parallel to this loss of languages, and in many ways just as frightening, is the loss of dialectical diversity. The major languages of Europe are in no danger of extinction, of course, but many of their dialects are. In very many places we are seeing the levelling out of differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, especially in areas where standard varieties are being fostered to the detriment of local varieties in the education system, and where metropolitan varieties are taking over from rural and small-town varieties.

Very often people stop speaking their local dialect, or fail to pass it on to their children, because they feel that it is inferior, inadequate and something to be ashamed of. In FOND

we know that the English dialect of Norfolk is part of a long tradition that can be studied in our schools and elsewhere.

It is an expressive, rich, distinctive and useful language variety that is part of a wider patchwork of English local dialects that makes our language so varied and interesting. And it is a variety of the English language that we can all be proud of and whose use we can feel free to encourage.

FOND Officers

Chairman - *Keith Skipper*, 25 St Mary's Road, Cromer, NR27 9DJ

Vice-chairman - *Martin Kirby*, Barley Cottage, Aldborough, NR11 7AA

Secretary - *Tony Clarke*, 30 Station Road, Beccles, NR34 9QJ

Membership secretary - *Brenda Bizzell*, Walnut Tree House, Forncett St Peter, NR16 1HR

Treasurer - *Janet Woodhouse*, Tumbleweed Cottage, Eastgate Street, North Elmham, NR20 5HE

Committee - *Vera Youngman*, Forge House, Station Road, Yaxham,
Colin Burleigh, 7 William Cowper Close, Toftwood,
Peter Brooks, 5 Abbey Road, Sheringham.

VIEW FROM THE HIGHLANDS

ALL THE KING'S MEN DINT SPEAK PROPER!

FOND Chairman Keith Skipper writes:-

Perfect timing, eh? FOND flexes its muscles as another big-name television production makes a mockery of the Norfolk tongue.

All The King's Men from Sandringham assembled proudly, then marched into the same old murky Mummerzet waters. Perhaps BBC Television drama chiefs muttered hopes that such linguistic liberties did not spoil your enjoyment of this high-class programme too much. But obvious qualities on a major stage merely emphasised a blatant lack of authenticity when it came to 'local' voices.

We have heard them all before. Countless times. Along with predictable excuses about the Norfolk sound being so difficult to capture and not enough professional actors and actresses able to give it a reasonable go. And to think they have the cheek to include 'dialect coach' in the credits!

The over-sensitive dialect lobby took a bow in the Eastern Daily Press letters columns as correspondents shared their views on the production. Over-sensitive? I would prefer to call us genuinely concerned about the way Norfolk people are portrayed to national and international audiences on television, radio and stage.

If we don't show concern, who will? And would it be too much of an exaggeration to suggest many supporters have joined FOND in the express hope of signalling an end to this long-running saga of counterfeit accents?

It remains to be seen - and heard - if FOND can make serious inroads before the next high-profile presentation demanding a genuine Norfolk flavour. Frankly, I doubt if placing the protest movement on a more formal footing will make much difference in the short term, although the Christmas offering of David Copperfield and his

Yarmouth friends caused fewer grimaces than us. When I was a full-time broadcaster with the B and increasingly frustrated by the Mumme treatment from all areas of the national media sent cassettes full of Norfolk voices to various television and radio drama departments. There were no acknowledgements, no follow-up inquiries, no acceptance that there were wrongs to put right. Apathy or arrogance. Probably a mixture of the two.

Norfolk's cussed streak remains the best hope of banishing the galling habit of lumping county dialects together and stirring them up in one rustic pot. FOND vows to lead the fight to individual character and respect for truly local tradition at the centre of all stages.

It was a great honour to be asked to serve as chairman on that memorable Sunday afternoon at Yaxham Village Hall when it became clear that a body dedicated to the rich sound and unique character of our county would lead to a wonderful new adventure.

Vice-chairman Martin Kirby, deputy editor of the Eastern Daily Press, has provided generous publicity in a newspaper noted for its unstinting support of local dialect over the years. That support is vital to our cause.

Terry Davy and Peter Brooks, past masters in the field, painstakingly drew up our draft constitution. Terry's tragic death just before Christmas not only robbed FOND of a major player, but the loss of a knowledgeable historian and publisher. Tony Clarke (secretary), Brenda Birt (membership secretary) and Janet Woodhouse (treasurer) have tackled their respective jobs with commendable relish, and with the commitment of a whole full of bright ideas and enthusiasm. It seems churlish to suggest the going might be tougher when the honeymoon period is over:

On The Squit Trail

The Press Gang, who proclaim the local gospel with evangelical zeal, are ready to take their old-style pulpit on the road again with a busy programme for the coming year.

FOND chairman Keith Skipper and his travelling troubadours have been drawing full houses in village, town and city since 1984.

They came under the Eastern Daily Press umbrella at the start of the 1996 season - and now there's a waiting list for their potent mixture of squit, wit and plenty more.

It is the unashamedly old-fashioned flavour of Press Gang concerts that attracts big audiences and regular bouquets, especially in rural parts where the village social used to be at the heart of local life.

Press Gang Fixtures - 2000 *All concerts start at 7.30pm.*

Saturday March 18th-
Rackheath Village Hall (for carnival funds)

Saturday March 25th-
Beccles Public Hall (in aid of Friends of St Michael's Church)

Saturday April 1st-
Longham Village Hall (in aid of hall funds)

Saturday April 8th-
Roydon (near Diss) Village Hall (in aid of hall funds)

Saturday April 15th-
Wreningham Village Hall (for Bracon Ash Church)

Saturday April 29th-
East Tuddenham Village Hall (in aid of hall funds)

Sunday May 7th-
Cromer Pier Pavilion Theatre (in aid of Break)

Saturday May 13th-
Brisley Village Hall (for hall and playing field funds)

Friday June 2nd-
Tivetshall Village Hall (for hall and playing field funds)

Saturday June 10th-
Diss Corn Hall (part of Diss Festival)

Saturday June 24th-
Hindolveston Village Hall (in aid of hall funds)

Saturday July 8th-
Langham - Patrick Allen's barn (part of Langham Street Fayre)

Saturday September 16th-
Gillingham Village Hall (in aid of hall funds)

Saturday September 23rd-
Three Holes Village Hall (in aid of Wisbech District Oddfellows)

Saturday September 30th-
Lyng Village Hall (for Friends of St Margarer's Parish Church)

First Fond Dew!

Calling all members and supporters! Our first FOND dew, an open meeting with emphasis on mardling and mixing, will be held at Yaxham Village Hall on Sunday, March 19th, starting at 2.30pm.

Professor Peter Trudgill, who outlines some of his hopes for our organisation in this newsletter, will give his Presidential address after flying back to his native county from the other side of the world. Refreshments will be served, and there will be plenty of time for dialect enthusiasts to meet and greet each other in an informal atmosphere. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for non-members. Pay at the door.
