

# A sense of humour that's not for outsiders

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The sense of humour that goes along with the Norfolk dialect isn't a bit like the Cockney humour of London, or the Scouse wit of Liverpool. Norfolk humour is dry, slow, deadpan, sardonic, understated, ironic. Outsiders don't always get it – which is part of the point.

In his book, *In Search of England*, HV Morton wrote about the car trip he took around the country in the 1920s. After he'd travelled from Lincolnshire into Norfolk, he wrote: "I was lost in a Norfolk lane, so I stopped a man and said to him: Good morning, can you tell me if I am right for Norwich?"

"The Norfolk man replied: 'What d'ye want to know for?'"

You and I can see that was a joke. The old Norfolk boy was having him on. But Morton didn't get it. He continued: "I might have been annoyed, but putting on an affable expression, I said: 'My dear old bo, I want to know because I want to get to Norwich'."

Then, patronisingly: "The ghost of a smile flitted over the man's rustic face, and he replied after some deep thought, rather reluctantly, and looking away from me: 'Well, you're right!'"

Morton thought this was because of a distrust of outsiders – the Norfolk man behaved "in an uneasy, suspicious way".



**JUST FOR LAUGHS:** The Boy John, a man who typified the Norfolk sense of humour.

But of course Morton was quite wrong. Here was a posh, supercilious outsider – driving a car no less – being the victim of Norfolk humour and not realising it.

Norfolk humour, of course, isn't just country people poking fun at sophisticates. The Boy John's Aunt Agatha came up with many an amusing, laconic and wise Norfolk aphorism: "All husbands are alike, only they have different faces so you can tell'em apart" is a good one.

And city people are pretty sharp too. I was once walking out of the doorway of a shop in Norwich as another man was

coming in. When I stepped to my left to let him pass, he simultaneously moved to his right to let me out, and blocked my exit. So I moved quickly back to my right – but at the same time he stepped in the same direction.

And then the same thing happened again. And again, and again.

The frustrating dance ended when we both stopped, with me still inside and him outside, looking at each other.

Then he said, without cracking his face: "Jus' one more time, then I gotta go hoom".