# Contents

| Foreword | page xiii |
| Acknowledgements | xv |
| Map | xvii |
| Themes | xviii |

## 1 History: how things came to be this way

1. Prologue: Sir William Jones and his revolution 1
1.1 Our ancestors across the sea 3
1.2 The oldest English word 4
1.3 Ouse 6
1.4 Detective work: our ethnic background 7
1.5 Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and “the Sheres” 9
1.6 The Great Heathen Army 11
1.7 Danes and Angles in the swamps 12
1.8 The “saint” and the poet 13
1.9 Those Normans and their handwriting 15
1.10 There’s likewise a wind on the heath 16
1.11 Germanic tribes in Grandad’s kitchen 18
1.12 Refugees and asylum seekers 20
1.13 Revolt and rebellion 22

## 2 Prescriptivism and other useless pastimes

2.1 Against uniformity 25
2.2 Wrong 27
2.3 On starting with a conjunction and ending with a preposition 28
2.4 Grammar questions for an expert 30
2.5 Aren’t there any rules? 31
2.6 Fewer and less 32
2.7 Apostrophe’s 33
2.8 Spelling-punctuation-and-grammar 35
2.9 Me, myself, I 36
2.10 The next couple is . . . 38
2.11 Singular they 40
2.12 Grammar and conkers 41
2.13 Norwegian classrooms 42
### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Language change: observing and accepting it</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Fing and bruvver</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Going with the flow</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>K-dropping</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Enough rejoicing</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Reasons to be cheerful, part I</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Don’t blame the Yanks</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Lay and lie</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is happening to words?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Latte?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Danish pastries</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>“It’s not American”</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Weakening and bleaching</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Wood for the trees</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Curb kerb</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>But</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>How many words do you know?</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Give us a butcher’s</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Feet and inches</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Surnames</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Maps and napkins</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>No boys named Sue</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Aitch</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Languages and dialects in contact and conflict</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Julius and Cleopatra</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Lesbian English</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Mandarin or not?</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>English is not enough</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>A tragedy and the Winter Olympics</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Semitic</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>What we can learn from the Welsh</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>“The only thing in life is language”</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>Gillian Anderson and the critical threshold</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>Vallée d’Aoste</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Respecting English grammar
6.1 You done it, did you? 90
6.2 Long John Hill 92
6.3 Youse, y’all, together 93
6.4 Quadruple negatives 94
6.5 As you like it 95
6.6 Who knows what an adverb is? 97
6.7 Nowt, naught, naught 98
6.8 Good grammar makes you happy 100
6.9 Bad English causes crime 101
6.10 Ministry circular 102

7 Respecting ordinary language
7.1 Well 104
7.2 Like like like 105
7.3 A sexist outrage 106
7.4 Tomatoes and girls 107
7.5 The euphemism treadmill 109
7.6 Visions 110
7.7 Customers 111
7.8 Alight 114
7.9 Mate 115
7.10 Viability 116
7.11 Seagulls 117
7.12 Is language really for communication? 118
7.13 The lexical bar 120

8 Sounds and fury
8.1 Well-spoken? 122
8.2 Prejudice holds us back 124
8.3 I don’t have an accent 125
8.4 Droppin your g’s is lazy 126
8.5 Phonotactics, or chimleys and goalkeepers 128
8.6 Dropping your aitches 129
8.7 Glottal stops 131
8.8 Snarl, sneer, sneeze, snicker, sniff 132

9 Respecting local speech
9.1 He in’t watchen on the marshes 134
9.2 The news in dialect 135
9.3 In the USA 137
Table of Contents

9.4 Hypocrisy and intelligence 138
9.5 Prejudice in art and business 139
9.6 Offensive 141
9.7 R’s where they don’t belong 142
9.8 Casual linguicism 144
9.9 The elephant in the room 145
9.10 Dialects and hitch-hiking 146
9.11 Like what I done here 147
9.12 So you can tell ‘em apart 149

10 Grammar: the wonder of it all 151
10.1 What is your evidence? 151
10.2 He and she 152
10.3 I’m going (to see them win) 154
10.4 Eat shoot and leave 155
10.5 Known and thrown 156
10.6 On on 158
10.7 Dual 159
10.8 Went, goed, went 160
10.9 Why not goodest? 161

11 More about words 163
11.1 Yes 163
11.2 Donkeys 164
11.3 Truce words 165
11.4 Samphire and swad 166
11.5 Isoglosses and swingletrees 168
11.6 Local words? 169
11.7 Punt and quant 171

12 Origins 173
12.1 Anne Boleyn 173
12.2 Back-formation: Thetford and the Germans 174
12.3 Anglo-Saxon dialects: the River Wensum 175
12.4 Great Snoring 177
12.5 Westlegate: Franks, Normans, Danes 178
12.6 Mystery etymology: the Great Cockey 181
12.7 Trunch 182
12.8 Black Shuck 183
12.9 Unthank 184
# Table of Contents

## 13 Accent rules

13.1 In New England  
13.2 The nineteenth vowel  
13.3 Snow joke: when puns don’t work  
13.4 Hair it is!  
13.5 Norwich rules  
13.6 Advanced Norwich  
13.7 Ugly?

## 14 Respecting names

14.1 Changes vs mistakes  
14.2 Spelling pronunciations: Aylsham and Walsham  
14.3 Folk etymology: aspirin, willows and Salhouse  
14.4 The BBC Pronunciation Unit  
14.5 Misinterpretation and Cley-next-the-Sea  
14.6 In-migration and spirited debates  
14.7 Sprowston and Old English vowels  
14.8 Hunstanton: twelve hundred years of linguistic change  
14.9 Ipsidge: a terrible lesson  
14.10 Heigham: the role of the media  
14.11 Clay, Lowstof and the £15,000 map  
14.12 Nowhere  
14.13 Tuning in to the way we speak  
14.14 What we call it  
14.15 Northwic

## Postscript

## Index