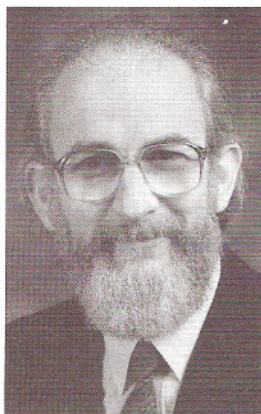


Isaac Pitman: the linguistic legacy



DAVID CRYSTAL

A survey ranging from the revolutionary work of Isaac Pitman in the nineteenth century through spelling reform and global English to the contemporary issue of the world's endangered languages

A shortened version of a paper presented to the Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Bath, England, 23 June 1997.

EVENTS marking the centenary of the death of Sir Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) – educator, spelling reformer, shorthand inventor, and language enthusiast – took place in June last year. They were held, appropriately enough, in Bath, where he lived for many years, and where he founded his Phonetic Institute and published his *Phonetic Journal*. Indeed, the city still houses the printing press he established, now called The Bath Press. Yet this link with the city might never have happened.

The Phonetic Institute

In 1873, when the building fund for his new Phonetic Institute had reached £893.11s.0d, Pitman received a letter from a Mr H. W. Fowler of London – whether related to the H. W. Fowler of usage fame, who would have been 15 at the time, I have not been able to establish – who writes:

Will you allow me to suggest that the proposed Phonetic Institute would be more likely to do good if built in London than at Bath. London must surely take rank as the first city in the empire for literature and commercial undertakings. I consider that you are comparatively hidden down at Bath. London would be more central for the whole body of

English phonographers. Come to our big village if you can, and you will be heartily supported. Perhaps even our Lord Mayor, who is so active in supporting different worthy objects, might give us a helping hand. Please put me down for 5s to the fund.

And he adds: 'I shall double it if you come to London.' Pitman published Fowler's letter in *The Phonetic Journal* for 21 June 1873, and contented himself to add only the acerbic comment:

Our friends who recommend us to build in London do not consider first the difficulty of getting a piece of ground, and secondly the cost of the undertaking.

As the target he was aiming for at the time was some £3000, and most people were being asked to subscribe at least £1, the offer of an extra 10s would not have appeared a great

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movement. And accordingly, the Phonetic Institute, in its various physical manifestations, stayed in Bath.

1873 was a significant year for Pitman. On 4 January appeared the first number of a new series of *The Phonetic Journal*, with a reduced price (from 3d to 1d). From a thousand a week, the circulation quickly quadrupled, and before long was 20 times what it had been. Previously, examples of lithographed shorthand and Pitman's proposed new spelling system had been provided in supplements; now they were incorporated into the *Journal*, and the elegantly printed specimens became an increasingly popular feature. Also in the pages of the 1873 *Journal* we read for the first time of the reasons for needing a new Phonetic Institute: the appalling conditions under which Pitman had to work in Parsonage Lane. His essay of 12 April 1873 is a valuable historical statement, providing us with a summary of the success of his new system of phonography as well as an insight into Pitman's remarkable character:

The Phonetic Institute is a single spacious room on the third floor above the ground floor of a large building formerly used as a brewery in Parsonage Lane, Bath, and is reached by a dreary staircase of fifty steps. It is exposed to the extremes of heat and cold, being under the roof, and the walls only six inches thick. ... Close to the street entrance is a slaughterhouse, and underneath and round about the building are the necessary appliances for keeping, killing, and cutting up sheep and cows for a large butcher's business. A more unsavoury entrance to business premises, I think, does not exist in the city. ... The dampness of this office has several times been the cause of loss in the damage of books by mildew. The roof is repaired almost every year, yet a violent storm or snow-fall always sends the water through the ceiling.

And a fortnight later, he adds (26 April 1873):

The present phonetic printing office is literally a rat's hole. ... rats of an enormous size find a congenial home. They scamper across the floor in the evening, when the sound of busy hands and feet has died away. We have seen and heard them scores of times when, in former years, we worked on till bed-time in the quiet evening hours, after the general closing of the office; and many a time the workmen have found their paste eaten by these voracious creatures, when it has been carelessly left within their reach. One of them made his bed in the waste-paper box one night, and having

overslept himself, was in a dreadful state of perturbation when, on waking, he found the large and comfortable 'rat's hole' in the possession of many tenants of another species. Having endured for above an hour the torture of feeling certain he was caught at last, he screwed up his rat-courage to the sticking place, took a desperate leap out of the rustling paper, scared the boys who were at work, and scampered away from his bed-room to his other home.

Pitman was one of several famous robust Victorian linguists who were prepared to work in appalling conditions in support of a language cause. James Murray was another, working in his Scriptorium at Oxford, a building which one visitor described as resembling a 'tool house, a washhouse, or a stable'. The 1870s were the decade when Murray was negotiating with the publishers and the Philological Society to produce the work which eventually became the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In cold weather he would work in a thick overcoat, often sitting with his feet in a box to keep away the draught, and he rarely got through a winter without several colds and often pneumonia. Working a 90-hour week, rising at 5, into his late 70s, Pitman was the same. And Pitman goes on, in his 12 April essay:

From 1843 to 1861 I labored at the case from six o'clock in the morning till ten at night, and literally never took a day's holiday, or felt that I wanted one; and I worked on till 1864 without the assistance of a clerk or foreman. During this period my income for the sale of phonetic books, after paying the heavy expenses connected with the perfecting and extension of 'Phonetic Printing', did not exceed £80 per annum for the first ten years, £100 for the next five years, and £150 for the next three years. During the first of these periods I was twice assessed for the income-tax. I appealed, and proved that my income was under £100. The commissioners appeared surprised that I should carry on an extensive business for the benefit of posterity.

But the prime reason for the proposed move in 1873 was not Pitman's dislike of discomfort, but the necessity of getting the publishing work done efficiently. By that date, phonography had ceased to be novelty and begun to be serious business. He was selling over 80,000 shorthand books a year. Classes had been set up all over the country, and most were prospering, as we can see from the *Journal*. In the April issues, for example, we find reports from over a dozen

centres in England and Scotland, and others coming from Massachusetts, Texas, and Melbourne. There was now no shortage of enthusiasts, veterans as well as neophytes. And, of course, with such zeal, came the inevitable rows.

There was, for example, a dispute over the use and direction of certain shorthand shapes, initiated by Revd W. J. Ball, which came to the boil in 1873 (see the *Journal* for 15 March and 31 May), and illustrates the emotional climate in which Pitman was working. The development of shorthand, and the proposals for spelling reform, did not take place in a calm atmosphere, as might befit a gentleman's club; the arguments for and against different systems (and several hundred had been proposed in addition to Pitman's) were heated, personal, and lengthy. There were anonymous accusations of lying, and forged letters to the press. During the Ball affair, we even find Pitman being accused of losing his sanity and using funds for his own purposes – and replying with evident enjoyment:

Every public man, whether he be in the whirl of politics, or the republic of letters, knows that shadows of abuse will be poured on the unhappy syllables of his name, and if his heart be in his work, he, of all men, will regret the storm the least. In the change of the vowel-scale of Phonography ... and in the case of every minor improvement ... my name has been roundly abused, both in print and correspondence. I do not complain. It is the well-known privilege of every Englishman to grumble at, and curse in his own fashion, perhaps with a mild 'Bother it!' anyone that puts him out of his way. But the scattering of such fire-brands, arrows, and death, as charges of 'broken faith', and insinuations of insanity, are more serious matters than mere grumbling and hard words, such as obstinacy, fickleness, and ingratitude – charges which are to be estimated according to the mental state and capacity, and the interests, of the utterer.

He goes on to refer to Ball's remarks as slanderous, perverted, egotistical, and incapable, commenting: 'Quackery is not confined to vendors of patent medicines.' All of which began over the best way of writing the shapes for initial and final *l* and *r*.

Spelling reform

What is perhaps surprising nowadays is that this was all to do with competing shorthand systems. If it had been spelling reform, we

might not be surprised, for high emotions are routine in that context. A few decades later, George Bernard Shaw raised hackles on the matter at a national level; and the hackles remain raised today, for there is no shortage of people willing to spend hundreds of hours devising a system to remove the anomalies of English spelling – and hundreds more refusing to see any merits whatever in anyone else's system apart from their own. Indeed, it is this failure to agree which has bedevilled the movement. As Alfred Baker points out, in his life of Pitman, there are three main reasons why the spelling reform movement has never prospered. First, the lack of any official body capable of acting as a clearing-house for linguistic ideas; second, the 'immense dead weight of vested interest opposition' from those who have already mastered the traditional system, and who publish in it; and third, 'the great diversity of projects for improving our spelling which are put forward by reformers, who have never agreed on any single scheme' (*The Life of Sir Isaac Pitman*, pp.210–11).

Perhaps there is something in the temperament of spelling reformers that they are so ready to fall out so quickly and so violently – though it is good to see a noticeably more equable element in the present-day membership of the Simplified Spelling Society. Certainly, in the past 200 years (i.e. since the work of Noah Webster in the USA), no proposals for spelling reform have ever come remotely near to achieving general acceptance (though in 1949 and 1953 proposals did attract a fair amount of parliamentary attention).

Spelling reformers come up with so many systems because the irregularity which characterizes English spelling comes from such diverse sources: the result of a variety of influences imposed over 500 years. From an original system which was reasonably regular (devised by Christian missionaries in Anglo-Saxon times), we find the addition of layers of innovation – the influence of different dialects, different scribal customs, different languages, different printing conventions (introduced by foreign printers), and different early attempts at regularizing or explaining individual words, some of which stuck (such as the *b* being added to *debt*, the *s* to *island*, or the *g* to *reign*). New idiosyncrasies entered the language along with new generations of loan words: over 150 languages have lent words to English, allowing such idiosyncratic forms as *epitome*, *chaos*,

piazza, and pneumonia. And above all, when Caxton's introduction of printing slowed down the changes in the writing system to almost a stop, the pronunciation of sounds continued to change regardless. Some letters formerly pronounced became silent (such as the *k* in words like *know*, or the final *e* in words like *stone*), and many sounds changed their character - in particular, all the long vowels altered their values in the great pronunciation earthquake during the 15th century now called the Great Vowel Shift. With so many sources of irregularity, spread over such a long period of time, there is no obvious, easy source of simplification. There are hundreds of possible regularizations - each one with some merit. The problem is agreeing on which one is likely to produce greatest linguistic efficiency, aesthetic appeal, and economic expediency. Such agreement has never been achieved.

Could proposals for spelling reform succeed today, or in the next century? I doubt it, and for a reason which is not one of the three suggested by Baker, but which is implicit in several contributions to the *Journal* of 1873. The 1870s was a decade in which considerable debate was taking place about the future of the English language - in the context of the remarkable growth of the British Empire during that century. By the end of the 19th century, English had become 'the language on which the sun never sets'. And by the 1870s it was beginning to dawn on those concerned with spelling reform that there was another powerful argument here in support of their aims. Let me summarize the theme of the paper reprinted in the very first issue of *The Phonetic Journal* for 1873. It is called 'Reasons for a Phonetic Representation of the English Language'. It had appeared in the periodical, the *Schoolmaster*, the week before, and Pitman hastened to bring it to the attention of his readers. The author, William White, surveys the influence of the major languages of the world, and finds them all to be diminishing or negligible - apart from English.

The English language is year by year widening its area, rising into prominence, and becoming a necessity for men of other tongues. ... English is the language of the future. ... (4 January 1873)

And the following week his article continues:

The prevalence of English, though thus assured, is encumbered with a great difficulty in its

barbarous orthography. ... What we want for the perfection of the English language is a phonetic alphabet. (11 January 1873)

For him, Pitman's reform is the nonpareil, and he recommends it wholeheartedly, and proposes the establishment of a Royal Commission to implement it as 'a matter of imperial importance'. His final paragraph begins, somewhat ruefully, 'I know I shall be told I am a dreamer ...'

This was indeed an era of dreams, as far as orthography was concerned. There was a mood of optimism amongst reformers. After all, some degree of order had been introduced into the vocabulary of English, just over a century before (by Dr Johnson's Dictionary); the rules of English grammar, likewise, had begun to be harnessed, being kept under tight rein by such grammarians as Bishop Louth and Lindley Murray, at around the same time; and exactly a century before, in 1773, John Walker had been putting the final touches to his dictionary of pronunciation. Surely it was now the turn of the orthography? The tone of the correspondence and articles throughout the whole of 1873 is bright and confident - and subscriptions for the new Phonetics Institute, introduced in April, had passed a thousand pounds by the end of the year.

Henry Pitman illustrates the tone from the provinces. He had been teaching courses on phonography in Manchester, and in the issue of *The Phonetic Journal* for 22 March he reports on what he had said in a recent lecture at the Friends' Institute (the Society of Friends) on 'Phonography and a Universal Language':

I endeavored to show that the English language had the fairest prospect of becoming the universal language ... I then noticed the one great obstacle - our imperfect and misused alphabet - and enforced the duty of spreading Phonography as a preparation for the reform of English spelling.

Note that last point. The thought was that by learning shorthand, with its unremitting concentration on regular sound-spelling correspondences, people would develop a frame of mind in which they would become increasingly dissatisfied with conventional spelling, and a climate of opinion in favour of reform would grow. 'The immense circulation of [Pitman's] shorthand has had the effect of familiarising the public mind with the theory of phonetic analysis and representation' (*Journal*, 13 September 1873).

The two major innovations of Isaac Pitman – shorthand and spelling reform – are often seen as separate from each other. In fact they are two sides of the same coin – a world euro.

Global English

The thought that English would become a world language appealed greatly to the spelling reformers during 1873. In the same address, Henry Pitman referred to some words of US President Ulysses Grant, in an address to the US Senate a few days before:

As commerce, education, and the rapid transit of thought and matter by telegraph and steam have changed everything, I rather think that the Great Maker is preparing the world to *become one nation, speaking one language* – a consummation which will render armies and navies no longer necessary.

Grant was only reflecting the climate of his time – the same climate which led Monsignor Johann Martin Schleyer to devise the artificial language Volapük six years later, as a contribution to the unity and fraternity of mankind, and Ludwig Zamenhof to introduce Esperanto in 1887. All, of course, were wrong: the use of a single language may improve mutual intelligibility but it does not guarantee peace; if we need evidence today, we need look only as far as Northern Ireland. Or reflect on the history of civil wars.

Judging by the statistics being quoted at that time, though, we can see why Grant was so optimistic. In the *Journal* for 13 September 1873, Pitman summarizes a ‘Plea for Phonetic Spelling’ he had read in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. The article gave statistics for the contemporary use of English as a mother tongue – just over 79 million, with 40 million in the USA. It then drew attention to some methods of calculation about population growth proposed by a French scholar, Alphonse de Candolle, in order to work out ‘the probable number of persons speaking the most important of the European languages at the end of the twentieth century ... We may estimate ... that in the year 2000 the most important languages will be spoken by the [following] number of persons ...’ and he gives figures for speakers of Italian, French, Russian, German, Spanish, and English. English is predicted to have – the precision is awesome – 1,837,286,153 speakers; but the point is that this total is almost four times as large as the

nearest rival, Spanish. And the conclusion of the argument is this: given the glorious future of English (and the triumphalism is evident throughout: ‘May it go forward conquering and to conquer, resistless in its power and majesty ...’), we have a duty to work towards the day when spelling will be reformed. The ‘absurd orthography ... is the stumbling-block which prevents the ready acquisition of the spoken language by foreigners’. Pitman was impressed by this article, and rushed out an issue of it as a penny tract, sixpence per dozen, probably considering the Global English argument the clincher.

It wasn’t. It couldn’t have been. And it is interesting to see why. But we must correct the figures first. All the predictions were well out. In the case of English, the main reason for the discrepancy was the assumption built into the argument, and which a Victorian would have found inconceivable to question, that the British Empire would continue to grow as it had already done.

The British Empire covers nearly a third of the earth’s surface, and British subjects are nearly a fourth of the population of the world. The native races of India, numbering 190,000,000 human beings, are governed by a mere handful of Englishmen: and it would be no new thing in the world’s history if these subject races were to learn and adopt the language of their conquerors. ... The widespread territorial influence of the British Empire must inevitably aid in extending the boundaries of the language

If the whole population of India – now probably the fastest-growing population on Earth, rapidly approaching a billion – and other such colonial nations had learned English, the predictions would have been accurate enough. But the fact of the matter is that, today, less than 5% of the population of India are fluent in English. That is still a significant number: 5% of a billion is a lot – almost as many as speak English in Britain. But it is not quite what the Victorian speculators had in mind. And the British Empire today, far from covering a third of the Earth’s surface, probably covers an area not much more than the Isle of Wight. None of them could have predicted that.

They were right in one respect, though: English has indeed become a global language, in the past century. The language now has a privileged position in virtually all countries – either as a first language, or mother tongue; as

a second language, with official or semi-official status within a nation; or as a preferred foreign language. As a consequence, it has come to be spoken by more people than any other language. Accurate estimates are not available, and vary widely from the conservative to the radical. But if we take 'middle-of-the-road' estimates, which are the ones I have opted for in my *English as a Global Language* (1997), the current figures are c.350-400 millions as a first language; c.300-350 millions as a second language; and c.500-700 millions as a foreign language. Approaching 1.5 billion in all – a figure which far exceeds the next most populous language, Mandarin Chinese. And Pitman may not have been so far out, statistically, for the figures are certainly underestimates as far as intentions are concerned: for example, the British Council estimates that a billion people will be learning English at the turn of the century. Global English, a dream in the mind of the Victorians, is now a reality.

Beyond being 'owned'

But two points immediately arise, when we reflect on this reality in relation to Pitman's hopes and aspirations. First, this remarkable growth has taken place despite the existence of the irregular spelling system. Certainly, any amount of irregularity poses a learning problem, and it is true that foreigners, as English children, have to devote more intellectual energy to mastering English spelling than they would have to do if the system were a regular one. But they have done so. It has not put people off. The benefits which stem from learning English have evidently been so enormous that they have provided the motivation for millions to take on the language, notwithstanding its orthography. We may continue to complain about the spelling, and satirize it – it is commonplace today to see joke poems about English spelling in foreign-language teaching materials, just as it was a century ago – but the learners learn on regardless.

Secondly – and this is the irony, as far as Pitman's reasoning was concerned – the growth of the language in fact militates against any spelling reform becoming successful. The more international any language becomes, the more difficult it is to achieve agreement about matters of usage – as the French have discovered in their attempts to impose their Academy's recommendations in Africa (or even Marseille). And in the case of English, the language has become so

international that any attempt to control its use would require unprecedented levels of cooperation. There is no mechanism for implementing any such decision-making. There isn't even a centre in any country devoted exclusively to celebrating the existence of language, though one such proposal is currently in its early stages of planning. This is *The World of Language*, a hands-on exhibition and information centre on the South Bank in London, presenting the fascination of language and languages. Occasionally language decisions are made by international bodies (e.g. the UN or the European Union), such as the various general statements to do with human linguistic rights, or the rights of minority language groups, which have been promulgated during the 1990s; but when these statements are published, how far they end up being ratified and implemented very much depends on individual countries. What Pitman did not see is that the growth of the language would inevitably make it more, not less difficult to promulgate a system of spelling reform.

The fact of the matter – an unpalatable fact to many, but a fact nonetheless – is that the English language has now passed beyond the stage of being 'owned' by any one nation. In Pitman's time, one could say with some justification that the language was owned by the British. A few generations later, and one would have to say that the language was owned by the Americans. Of the 350 million or so mother-tongue speakers of English in 1990, 226 million were from the USA – nearly two-thirds. But today we are rapidly approaching a state of affairs in which there will be more people who speak English as a second language than who speak it as a first language. The population growth in the 75 or so countries which use English as a second language (such as India and Nigeria) is about three times that of the countries where English is a first language. This means that, within the next couple of generations, mother-tongue speakers of English will become a minority. Indeed, if we include foreign-language speakers, and take our figure of 1.5 billion seriously, then even American English must be seen now as only a dialect of World English. And British English, with its mere 56 millions, even more so.

Diversification alongside standardization

Moreover, the trend, around the present-day English-using world, is to foster diversification

alongside standardization. This is not as paradoxical as it sounds, when we consider that language is used for two chief purposes. We need it to communicate intelligibly with each other, and we need it to express our identities, whether as individuals, community groups, or nations. To guarantee intelligibility we need a standard language - and this exists, in print, with very little variation (apart from the US/UK spelling difference) around the English-using world. To permit identity, we need regional varieties - local dialects, if you will, but on an international scale. These also now exist, the oldest being Scots vs English English, the most noticeable being American vs British English, and the most recent being the 'new Englishes' found in Australia, New Zealand, India, Singapore, Nigeria, South Africa, and elsewhere. Each is distinguished by having its own vocabulary - often, tens of thousands of local words and idioms - its own pronunciation, and occasionally its own features of grammar. Spelling is either British or American, depending on historical factors, but is also often a mixture of the two, as in Australia and Canada (where you might see, for example, a 'tire centre'). The point is that the energy behind the emergence of each of these new varieties is entirely local, or ethnic: people are extremely sensitive to the linguistic features of their locality which provide their identity, are proud of them, and do not like it when these features are threatened from outside. Many people feel the same about British English when it falls under the influence of Americanisms. It is the same everywhere. And in such a climate, proposals of a centrist kind, especially coming from an ex-colonial super-power, are viewed with suspicion or open antagonism.

So, we are faced, it seems, with a scenario in which the two main thrusts of Isaac Pitman's work - shorthand and spelling reform - have both been overtaken by events. Systematic spelling reform (distinguishing it from the ad hoc simplifications frequently found these days on the Internet) despite the continuing enthusiasm of its practitioners, seems unlikely to make more progress in the next 100 years than in the last. And the value of shorthand has slowly been eroded by the electrical and now the electronic revolutions. Pitman, in his last lecture on Phonography, given in the Town Hall of his birthplace, Trowbridge, in 1892, observed that when he looked back over his career, he often thought of the words of

Scripture, 'What hath God wrought!' (Baker, *Life*, p. 289). There is an irony even here, for only 15 years before, Thomas Alvar Edison had devised the phonograph, the first machine that could both record and reproduce sound, and the first words he recorded on that device were 'What God hath wrought!'. The phonograph, of course, was the great grand-daddy of the dictaphone, a device which, more than any other, was to knock the bottom out of the secretarial shorthand market. Shorthand will probably always have a role to play in our society, as there will always be situations where people wish to make rapid notes about what is being said, yet where electrical voice recording is impracticable. Journalists, for example, still make great use of it. But the electronic revolution is making it certain that it will play a minority role. Machines already exist which can provide a print-out of your words as you speak them - as long as you have 'trained' the machine to recognize your voice, and as long as you do not speak too rapidly. Within a generation or two, transcriptions produced by rapid automatic speech recognition will be routine.

Pitman's legacy

Although the problems of language which Pitman faced up to in his day may no longer seem so critical, they have been replaced by others which most certainly are. The challenges facing the contemporary linguist demand the same industry, single-mindedness, and visionary zeal as we have seen characterizing Pitman's life and work. What comes across repeatedly in every issue of the 1873 *Phonetic Journal* is his fascination with and love of language, his clear sense of linguistic principles, and a meticulous attention to linguistic detail. These are precisely the attributes I would want to see in modern linguists - and especially in those who opt to become involved in the most complex domain of linguistics, the role of language in society, and in the most urgent linguistic task facing us all in the new millennium.

And what is this task? No more and no less than the preservation of linguistic diversity on this planet. It is still not widely known that, within the next century, around half the languages currently spoken on Earth will die out. Of some 6,000 languages spoken today, over half are spoken by less than 10,000 people,

and over a quarter by less than 1,000. For a variety of reasons going back to the early days of colonial exploration, and now largely bound up with the processes which have turned our world into a 'global village', it is becoming increasingly difficult for smaller languages to resist the impact of larger language neighbours. The task is plain, and was stated unequivocally at a Quebec Congress in 1992:

As the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and, if possible, sponsoring programs ... for the description in the form of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, including the recording of the oral literatures, of hitherto unstudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages.

The task is urgent, and UNESCO did set up a project the next year. Once a language is gone, without being recorded, it is as if it had never been – its unique world-view is lost for ever. And at present, an unrecorded language is dying somewhere in the world every fortnight or so.

If Pitman were alive today, he would I am sure be concerned to get the facts. He would acknowledge that the problem was vast, and that it could not be solved by any one person. He would see that there needed to be action at both international and national levels, and he would begin to make a fuss, building up support at grass-roots level. He would lecture indefatigably on the issue. And in due course he would see the need for an Institute to support the kind of work which needs to be done, to provide a mechanism for like-minded people to talk to each other, and to create a forum for influencing public opinion. He might call it the Foundation for Endangered Languages. He would set it up, probably in Bath. And he would clamour for funds.

Well, there actually is a Foundation for Endangered Languages, which aspires to all the aims I have mentioned. It was set up in 1995 by Nicholas Ostler, who is now its president. It is small but slowly growing, making

links with similar bodies in other parts of the world. I am a member; and it seems to me that anyone interested in the legacy of Isaac Pitman should support it too. But why do I mention this here? Because its president now lives in Bath – and I find it highly appropriate that yet another important linguistic initiative should be associated with this city, a century on. Maybe it is something in the Roman water, but, whatever the reason, the spirit of Pitman lives on in Bath. **ET**

The aims and objectives of the Foundation for Endangered Languages

The Foundation exists to support, enable and assist the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. Specifically, it aims:

- To raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all channels and media;
- To support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life;
- To monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary;
- To support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results;
- To collect together and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages;
- To disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.

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