

David and Hilary Crystal's latest book *Wordsmiths and Warriors: An English-Language Tourist's Guide to Britain*, is a fascinating departure: part linguistic exploration, part travel guide. Babel interviews David Crystal about the book and includes an illustrated extract.

Wordsmiths & Warriors

The David Crystal interview

Interview

*What gave you the idea for *Wordsmiths and Warriors*?*

David Crystal: A few years ago I was flicking through my *The Stories of English* (2004) and reflecting on the map at the back which locates all the places mentioned in the book – and realised that I'd never been to most of them or, in some cases, even knew what they looked like. A textbook might contain the occasional grainy picture of some of the places – I recall one of Maldon, for example – but it would be unusual to encounter a colourful, enticing, and informative image. What did Ebbsfleet look like, where the Anglo-Saxons landed? Or Edington, where Alfred defeated the Danes and guaranteed a future for English? I had no idea. And I had another unanswered question. My map identified over fifty places where something important happened in relation to the language – important enough to deserve mention in a textbook on the history of

English, anyway. Did any of these places actually acknowledge that fact? Were the linguistic events ever recognized and celebrated? There are many places where important studies happened – a dictionary compiled, a grammar written, a history penned. Were any of the authors officially recognized for their linguistic achievement? Was there a blue plaque to a language scholar anywhere in Britain? I had no idea.

So we planned the trip. Or rather, trips. Whenever I was invited to lecture in a particular part of the country, Hilary and I would visit the places nearby. Hilary would take the photos, I would write the text. It took eighteen months to get to them all. And some we had to visit twice, as the first time the weather was so bad (our journey included that awful summer of 2012!) they were unphotographable.

How can this book be used by English language tourists?

DC: I remember telling an English language teacher in a school about the project. Her A-level students were always complaining. 'History students get the chance to visit battlefields. Geographers go on field trips. Where can WE go?' I felt that *Wordsmiths and Warriors* would solve that problem, because wherever you are in Britain there's likely to be a place of linguistic interest not too far away. The problem is that most people don't know it's there – or, if they do know about the place, they aren't aware of its significance in relation to the language. So the book does two things: it tells you how to get there, and then explains what you'll find when you arrive. And what applies to students applies to anyone interested in being a language tourist – which means most people, as travelling, language, and landscapes are always intimately connected. The book is organized chronologically, but at the

back we group the locations regionally, so that anybody visiting one place can see immediately what may be nearby.

Where was the most inspiring language site and why?

DC: That's a difficult question, as we found every place intriguing and inspiring in some way.

They were all so different – the differences of course coloured by our awareness of what happened there. I suppose the oldest places – those associated with the early years of the language in Britain – made the greatest impact on me. Having explored Old English for, well, over fifty years now, visiting such sites as Ruthwell, Jarrow, Peterborough, and Maldon was a bit like visiting old friends. Of the more recent places, the dialect writers' memorial in Rochdale did my heart a power of good. It's rare to encounter a physical monument to language.

What kind of adventures did you have along the way?

DC: Tales of the Unexpected. Even in the places I thought I knew well, there was always something surprising when we arrived. We weren't expecting to see a procession of mini-monks in Jarrow, or Dr Who in Dinefwr, or an apparent monument to the definite article in Dunfermline, or Robbie Burns given messianic status in Alloway. We never expected Lindley Murray to be associated with lead thieves, nor Anglo-Saxons with hovercrafts, nor pronunciation lexicographer John Walker with novelist Thomas Hardy. Adventures typically involve an encounter with the unexpected, something that makes your pulse race. We found ourselves in this position repeatedly, during our linguistic odyssey. ¶

WORDSMITHS AND WARRIORS; AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TOURIST'S GUIDE TO BRITAIN

by David and Hilary Crystal
Oxford University Press, £20

Chapter 4: Jarrow: Bede and the origins of English

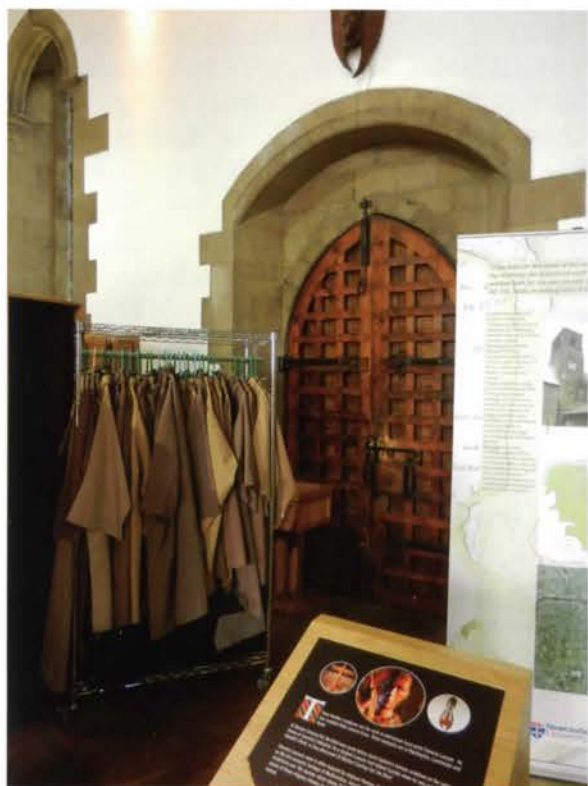
'Did he work hard?' The question came from a 6-year-old, dressed in a monk's habit. He was one of a group of 30 children on a school trip to the Anglo-Saxon monastery site of St Paul's Church in Jarrow. When we arrived, they were already packed tight into the end of the chancel, each one duly habited, and listening with rapt faces as their guide told them all about Bede and his times. The lady volunteers looking after the church said another school group was due later that morning. The costumes were evidently in great demand.

As the children de-habited, we listened to their excited chatter. Several of the questions had a linguistic slant. 'How did he write?' 'Did he have paper?' A visit to the nearby Bede's World would answer these questions. Among the museum's artefacts is a stylus, which could be used to write in wax or to draw straight lines on vellum, guiding the writing of the scribes. And there's a replica of the huge Codex Amiatinus, a single-volume Latin Bible made around 700. The original was sent to Italy as a gift to the Pope, and is named after the abbey at Monte Amiata where it was placed in the 9th century. It's now in Florence.

Another question from a tiny monk: 'What did he eat?' The reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon farm at Bede's World shows the vegetables, herbs, animals, and fish that the monks would have known. The farm animals have been bred to resemble those found in Anglo-Saxon times. Two Dexter oxen have been named, period-



The eastern end of St Paul's Church, showing the Anglo-Saxon church. The monastery site has changed a lot in recent years. Trees have grown quite high along the hillside leading down to the Don, so that the unimpeded view of the church along with the ruins on one of the official postcards is now totally lost.



The habits awaiting their next group of small wearers

appropriately, Oswin and Edwin. The farm is called Gyrwe, the Old English name for Jarrow—pronounced roughly as ‘yeerway’. It’s an atmospheric place, with three full-size timber buildings—though these are dwarfed by the enormous riverside development next door, with its electricity pylons, cranes, storage tanks, and container ships.

St Paul’s Church is just a couple of minutes’ walk down the hill from the museum, through a children’s grassy playground. You can’t miss it: just look for the largest pylon. The ruins behind the church, on the land as it falls away to the River Don, locate the monastery where Bede spent most of his life. There were originally two churches on the site, later linked by a tower. The one to the west of the tower was demolished, and the area today provides St Paul’s with its nave. It’s the church to the east, now forming the chancel, which has features surviving from Bede’s time. The Latin dedication stone is original. An



Gyrwe, with modern Jarrow behind



The Norman tower through the medieval wall

ancient chair, known as ‘Bede’s chair’, rests against a wall. Large corner stones from the 7th-century building can be seen, and there are three original windows in the south wall. The pieces of coloured soda-lime glass forming the small circular central window were found during excavation—

the oldest stained glass found in Europe, so they say.

Almost everything we know about Bede (c.672–735)—Bæda, in Old English—comes from some autobiographical remarks in his major work, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ‘The Ecclesiastical History of the English People’. This was an



The Latin dedication stone, now placed above the chancel arch. It's sculpted in bold Roman capital letters, with some words abbreviated:

DEDICATIO BASILICAE
 SCI PAVLI VIII KL MAI
 ANNO XV ECFRIDI REG
 CEOLFRIDI ABB EIVSDEM
 Q ECCLES DO AVCTORE
 CONDITORIS ANNO IIII

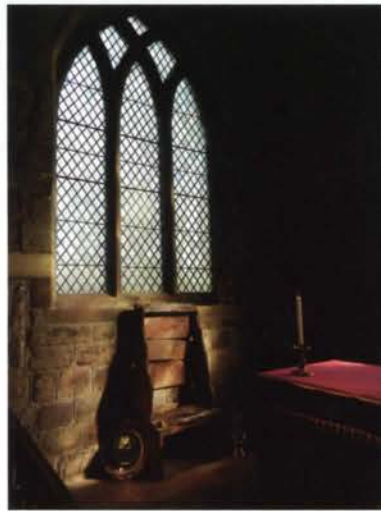
'The dedication of the basilica of St Paul on the ninth day before the kalends of May in the fifteenth year of King Ecgfrith and the fourth year of Abbot Ceolfrith, founder by the guidance of God of the same church'

That would be 23 April 685. It's the earliest such stone to be found in an English church. Bede would have seen it every day.

ambitious 400-page treatment organized into five books, and the reason that he is regularly described as 'the father of English history'. At the very end of the fifth book he gives us a list of his writings, and tells us:

Bede, servant of Christ and priest of the monastery of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul which is at Wearmouth and Jarrow... was born in the district around this monastery. When I was seven years of age my kinsmen gave me into the care of the most reverend abbot Benedict, and later of Ceolfrith, to be educated. From then on I have spent all my life in this monastery, devoting myself entirely to the study of the scriptures. And while observing monastic discipline and singing daily office in the church, my chief delight has always been to learn or to teach or to write.

And write he did. He is the author of over 60 works on history, geography, and science, as well as of biblical



Bede's chair

commentaries, lives of the saints, hymns, and poems. The English-language tourist will take special note of his books on orthography, metrics, and figures of speech, but will probably spend most time reflecting on his account of the origins of English in the 'Ecclesiastical History'. It is a summary which has been reported in virtually every history of the language.

Bede's aim was to tell the story of how Christianity arrived in Britain, but in so doing he became the first to give an account of the island's history, and he is the earliest literary source we have for the linguistic events which shaped the nation (Chapter 1). In his opening chapter he tells us:

This island at present ... contains five nations, the

Getting there

These sites are most directly accessed from the A19. From the north, after you pass through the Tyne Tunnel, turn left onto the A185 signposted Jarrow, left again at the roundabout (with a tourist sign to Bede's World) and then left into Church Bank. At the top of the hill you see parking signs left and right to Bede's World (postcode: NE32 3DY); the car park on the left is very much larger. From the south, leave the A19 just before the tunnel and follow the signs.

If you want to visit St Paul's first, you turn right before going up the hill. You can park right outside the church, or turn left at the end of the side road, where there is a parking area next to the river (postcode: NE32 3DZ).

For Durham Cathedral, leave the A1(M) at junction 31 (from the south) or 32 (from the north) and follow the signs to the city centre. Prince Bishop car park is immediately in front of you. Signs point you towards the cathedral (where parking is permit-restricted), so the postcode is not much help (DH1 3EH). Turn right immediately inside the door for the Galilee Chapel. But don't expect to take photographs. Cameras are not allowed, as we discovered on our visit, and we could get no immediate dispensation even after a visit to the Chapter Office to plead a special case. So we can give you no picture of Bede's tomb in this book. You will however find one on the Durham Cathedral website.

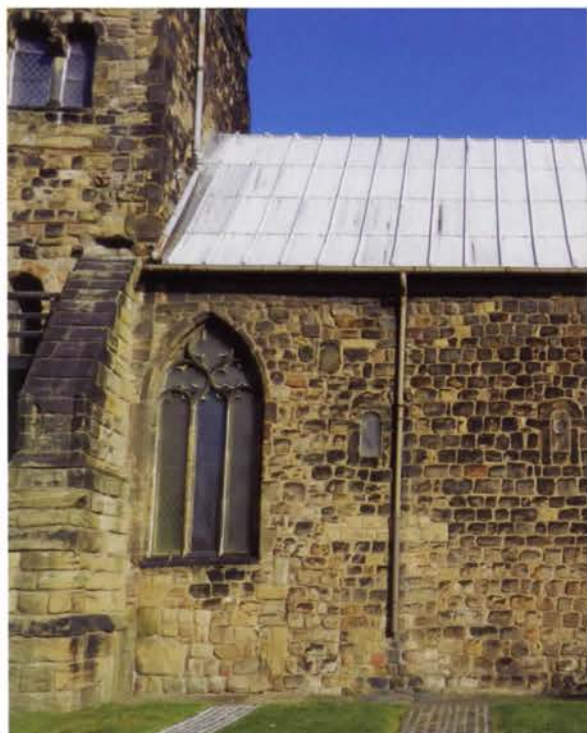
Bede's bones

Bede has to play second fiddle at Durham, which is officially the shrine of St Cuthbert. But the Galilee Chapel is an effective setting for his remains, which have been placed in an altar tomb of blue marble, with two tall candles on each side. On the top is a simple Latin inscription:

HIC SUNT IN FOSSA BEDAE VENERABILIS OSS
Here in this tomb are the bones of the Venerable Bede

In the wall recess behind the tomb is a quotation from his commentary on the Book of Revelation, in Latin and English, in large gold letters on a wooden frame:

*Christ is the morning star
 who when the night
 of this world is past
 brings to his saints
 the promise of
 the light of life
 & opens everlasting day*



Above: Anglo-Saxon corner stones below the main window

Top right: The cobbled pathway in the foreground marks the line of the medieval monastery walls. The flat paving stones running towards the walls show the location of Anglo-Saxon walls. The building here would probably have been a large hall with a dormitory above. At the east end (to the left in this picture) there was a suite of two small rooms, probably a small oratory and an adjoining monk's cell. It is a plausible candidate for Bede's death-bed.



Right: The window containing glass made in the monastery, in its original stone surround



opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East-Saxons, the South-Saxons, and the West-Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East-Angles, the Midland-Angles, Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the English.

Even though there are real problems interpreting exactly what Bede meant, it is clear that Britain was multiethnic and multilingual from the outset. For those who marvel at the diversity of accents and dialects in Britain, the source of the variation lies here.

The archaeologists must have had a marvellous time working on this site. Viking raids beginning in 794 burned the monastery, and it ceased to function until some rebuilding took place in the 11th century. There are thus medieval as well as Anglo-Saxon foundations and remains, and the original wall-lines have been carefully picked out in the grounds. English

language tourists should ignore the cobbled paths, which show the later period of construction. The walls of the buildings Bede would have known are demarcated by pathways laid out in flat stone slabs. The original floors lie about 2 ft (60 cm) below the present ground level.

Bede's monastery was unusual, as it was 'one monastery in two places' (as its founder, Benedict Biscop, put it)—the first foundation at Wearmouth, and the second a year later at Jarrow, seven miles distant. There's no record of how Bede might have moved between the two locations, but tradition points to Jarrow being his home. This is where he was buried—though not for long. In 1022 his bones were removed by a Durham cleric and taken to Durham Cathedral, where they lay for a while alongside the coffin of Saint Cuthbert. In 1370 they were placed in a separate shrine in the Galilee Chapel of the cathedral.

The 'Ecclesiastical History' is over 400 pages. It would take a scribe several months to copy it out. We know that several copies were made. And Bede wrote over 60 books. Our 6-year-old's question is easily answered. Yes, he did. ¶

English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins, each in its own peculiar dialect cultivating the sublime study of Divine truth. The Latin tongue is, by the study of the Scriptures, become common to all the rest.

He reports the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in ad 449, and describes where they came from:

Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany—Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West-Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated