

A

# GENERAL DICTIONARY

OF

## PROVINCIALISMS,

WRITTEN WITH A VIEW TO RESCUE FROM OBLIVION THE FAST FADING  
RELICS OF BY-GONE DAYS.

Tenet insanabile multos  
Scribendi Cacoethes.

LABOR IPSE VOLUPTAS.

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BY

WILLIAM HOLLOWAY.

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1839.

## FOREWORD.

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One would never guess, from the mild and self-deprecating tone of his Preface, that William Holloway (1786-1870) was such an activist. He moved to Rye in Sussex in the 1820s, fell in love with the place, and became prominent in the reform movement of the decade. Angered at local government corruption, he was a leader of a group that invaded the town hall, locking out the mayor and corporation for six weeks. After the 1832 Reform Act, things settled down, and he turned to more intellectual pursuits. He wrote widely on local history, publishing a 600-page *History and Antiquities of the Ancient Town and Port of Rye* (1847) and two *Antiquarian Rambles Through Rye* (1863, 1866). An early environmentalist and social reformer, he made his mark on the town in a novel way, in 1859 renaming all the streets and renumbering the houses to assist the emerging postal service. He was an indefatigable collector of ephemera, and an early side-product of his collecting mania was this *General Dictionary of Provincialisms*, published in 1839.

It was a product of its time. The first half of the nineteenth century has rightly been called the 'age of dictionaries'. At the beginning of his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1860), Joseph Worcester provides a catalogue of the works in this genre that had been published to date, and identifies sixty-four items published in England since Samuel Johnson's magisterial dictionary of 1755 and thirty in America since Noah Webster's first dictionary of 1806 - almost one a year. These were all general dictionaries, on English as a whole. In

addition the period saw the publication of over 200 specialised dictionaries and glossaries, as well as thirty encyclopedias, showing how compilers were under pressure to keep up with the increase in terminology taking place as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

At the same time, there was considerable interest in the language of the streets. In 1809, George Andrewes published his *Dictionary of the Slang and Cant Languages* (1809), written so that readers would come to understand the deceptive language used by criminals and thus feel more secure. In the same genre was George Kent's *Modern Flash Dictionary* (1835) - *flash* was a label for the slang of thieves, sportsmen, and fashionable men about town. Dozens of slang dictionaries appeared in the early decades of the 19th century, aiming to make good the perceived limitations of Johnson, who had focused on cultured English and who was quick to condemn as 'vulgar' the words of which he disapproved.

Regional speech had also been a source of fascination. As early as 1746, Tim Bobbin (the pseudonym of John Collier) had made a name for himself with *A View of the Lancashire Dialect*, and his success prompted many others to do the same. Authors recorded traditional stories from their town or county, wrote dialect poetry, collected folk songs, and produced dialect translations of well-known works, such as the Bible. Towards the end of the century, Robert Burns proudly introduced the Scots dialect to the world. The trend continued into the nineteenth century, reinforced by the nostalgic view of the countryside fostered by Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. It would evolve into the major collections by such writers as William Barnes, the Dorset poet, whose first collection appeared in 1844. Several major novelists would include regional speech in their works, such as Emily Brontë, Charles Dickens, Walter Scott, and Thomas Hardy.

William Holloway's dictionary has to be seen in this climate. Its subtitle shows he is a true Romantic. He wrote his book, he tells us, 'with a view to rescue from oblivion the fast fading relics of by-gone days'. Several others had done the same thing for local areas, such as *The Yorkshire Garland* (1825), but

Holloway throws his net much wider. His aim is to include the whole country, even though, as he says in his 'Introduction', there are areas about which he knows little or nothing. It is a labour of love, illustrating the enthusiasm of the collector rather than the judiciousness of the dialectologist. He relies a lot on his friends and acquaintances for his material, and his account is at times vague and impressionistic. His observations about accent are frequently naive (as at Buckingham), thin (as at Staffordshire), or uninformative (as at Derby and Cheshire); but his anecdotes are usually illuminating, and capture the attitudes and character of his period. A good example is his reproduction of the *v/w* substitutions heard in the Middlesex/London accent, reinforcing the view that this was a real phonetic feature of the time and not just a Dickensian comedic invention for Sam Weller.

The 'Introduction' is difficult to interpret at times, because Holloway could not possibly have solved the universal problem of his day: how to find a way of writing down regional sounds using an orthography that had developed to represent standard English. Accurate transcriptions of regional accents would have to await the arrival of the science of phonetics some decades later. We are left with just a few tantalising glimpses of mid-nineteenth-century dialect pronunciations. It is the dictionary compilation itself that is the impressive and memorable feature.

His approach is surprisingly modern, with source locations scrupulously recorded, clear definitions, and copious examples of usage. His method anticipated Joseph Wright, whose huge *English Dialect Dictionary* appeared at the end of the century, and Wright in fact lists Holloway as one of his sources. However, comparing Holloway with Wright's much fuller entries, it is clear that the information in Holloway is very limited. Many of the words he identifies were being used in locations other than those he names, and his etymologies are often private suppositions (e.g. *blouzy, jam*) rather than systematic philological accounts. But his range is wide: unlike many other works of the period, he brings together slang (e.g. *darks, trot*) and technical terms, especially from agriculture

(e.g. *balk*, *canch*), as well as a huge number of everyday expressions – some 9000 entries in all. Several entries provide an insight into the social background of his time (e.g. *dame*, *farmer*). But the primary interest of the book to the modern reader will be the words that he called the ‘fast fading relics’ – delightful creations such as *daffock*, *jaup*, *plumpendicular*, *pungled*, *quackle*, *rubbackrock*, *shrammed* (with cold), *trubagully*, *wamble*, and *zwop*. Every page of the dictionary brings to light these words of the past – though modern dialect studies show that (contradicting the pessimism Holloway expresses in his Preface) not all of them have totally disappeared from their regional homes.

There are two Latin tags on Holloway’s front page. The first is a quotation from the Satires of Juvenal: ‘The incurable desire for writing affects many’. The second is a motto: ‘Work itself is a pleasure’. Dipping into this dictionary is a pleasure too.

Professor David Crystal