



## FOREWORD BY DAVID CRYSTAL

Language is people. And people live in places. So if we want to find out about a language, we need to encounter the people and the places that helped make it what it is. That's the premise of this book, compiled by two members of the English Project.

It's an especially appropriate perspective for English, which has connections with more places than any other language. Its global reach has no parallel. And one of the best ways of developing a sense of this reach is to explore some of the places where it is to be found.

To study them all would be impossible, with over 2 billion people speaking English around the world, coming from every country and territory. But when we look at the phenomenon historically, certain places do stand out, either because they are where the language grew up, or because they are where it has achieved a particularly significant contemporary presence.

One of the major themes in the study of global English is to explain the two major forces that have shaped – and continue to shape – the language. Much of the emphasis has been on the notion of a Standard English, a variety that guarantees mutual intelligibility among those who use the language, whichever part of the world they come from. At the same time, a great deal of attention has been paid to the varieties of English that express the local identity of its speakers, viewed both within nations and internationally. Place is a fruitful way of bringing together these two forces, intelligibility and identity.

Some places are included in this book because the people – in some cases the person – who lived there played an important role in the development of the standard language. Others are included because they identify the political and social factors that fostered the spread of the language within the British Isles and around the world. Others are here because they represent the way their communities evolved a linguistic individuality that forms part of the kaleidoscopic mix of varieties we conveniently refer to as 'English'.

It is an exercise in linguistic gazetteering, and one thing that strikes me about it is its highly personal character. It's impossible to say everything relevant about a place – 100 things must have happened in London or New York that could be said to

bear on the development of English. And 100 other places might compete as candidates for a particular theme. Selectivity is inevitable when creating a language's geobiography. No two people's selection for *A History of the English Language in 100 Places* would ever be the same. The fascination lies in the choices made, and the reasons for them.

It is not surprising to see such an anthology emerge from the English Project, for this is an enterprise intimately connected with the notion of place. Its long-term vision is to provide the English language with a permanent space, within which its history, structure and use can be presented with the same kind of visual appeal that we confidently associate with visits to art galleries, science museums and heritage sites. The chosen place for this enterprise is Winchester, whose crucial role in the history of English is rightly acknowledged in this book.

The places selected for inclusion well illustrate the scope of the English Project. I can easily imagine many of the chapters providing, in a developed form, the content for exhibits in such a gallery. It's easy to do this for the written language, where inscriptions, manuscripts and books readily provide a concrete, visual treat. The spoken language is more of a problem. It is such an evanescent thing that it is difficult to see how it could be turned into a space that visitors might actually walk around and find interesting. One of the solutions is to focus on place. Whether it is Stratford or Singapore, New Orleans or New Delhi, seeing the people in their setting, while we listen to them interact, provides speech with an illuminating reality.

A second thing that strikes me about the places included in this book is the variation in scale that they represent. We read about places as small as Bletchley Park or Hampton Court and as large as Cape Town or San Francisco. The larger locations often receive acknowledgement in textbooks on English. Places such as Boston or Sydney are familiar to the English language enthusiast because historically they are well-known points of entry into a new territory. Smaller places, unless they are very famous, tend to be passed over in silence, if only because there are so many of them.

And yet every small community plays its part in forming the rich tapestry of English. Henry Higgins became famous in *Pygmalion* for his ability to pinpoint accents down to a few miles or even a few streets. He isn't alone. Everyone has a sense of dialect variation operating at the level of the individual town, village and suburb. We all value our local linguistic identity, while recognizing that we are part of a huge global English-speaking community. Both dimensions are there in *A History of the English Language in 100 Places*.