

# The Simplified Spelling Society

## Newsletter & Notice of Annual General Meeting [N3]

Issued April 1, 1992 by The Secretary, Bob Brown

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### 1. AGM LECTURE

Dr G Thorstad of the Tavistock Centre will address us on

#### The Effect of Orthography on the Acquisition of Literacy Skills

and her work generally Saturday April 26, 1992 at 10:45 in London

Dr Thorstad's recent work is concerned with testing the effects of orthographies — or, more strictly, the regularity of orthographies — on teaching literacy to native speaking children. Her important paper with the same title as above (*British Journal of psychology* 1991 82 527-537) compares the reading and spelling of 70 Italian children aged 6–11 years with that of 90 English children learning TO, and 33 learning through the initial teaching alphabet (*ita*).

The paper provides quantitative evidence suggesting that a consistent orthography naturally leads children to adopt a phonological strategy, and thus learn to read and write more quickly and accurately.

In her presentation, she will summarise this work and go on to present further detail.

Copies of various papers, including the valuable main paper, will be available to those attending.

### AGM NOTICE

The Annual General Meeting of the Simplified Spelling Society will be held on April 26, 1992.

At the time of going to press, the Society has 103 members.

*Motion — Item 10.* "RESOLVED that

1. In order to clarify its public position, and always within its constitutional aim 'to bring about a reform of the spelling of English', the Society affirms the following more detailed statement of its aim:

- to encourage the idea that spelling reform is possible;
- to foster debate on the possible nature of reform and how it might be brought about;
- to devise, publish and promote suitable potential reform schemes and other research materials, in contribution to debate; by definition, the Society puts forward for consideration by the public and authorities any spelling reform proposals that it publishes;
- to persuade and campaign for spelling reform in general; to develop and maintain the Society's role as a source of expertise in spelling and relevant associated disciplines;

2. The Society rescinds any earlier decisions committing itself to use of a suitable potential reform schemes 'house style' in internal or external correspondence."

## 2. Cut Spelling Launch

After several years of hard work, Chris Upward's long-awaited [Cut Spelling Handbook](#) has been published. All members should have received their copy by now. As usual with Society publications, about 30 copies have also been distributed to various spelling reformers overseas, academies with a known interest in the subject, *Journal* correspondents, and others on our circulation list.

On March 26 a press conference was held at the London School of Economics in London, to announce the arrival of the book to the media. Representatives from two press agencies, a number of newspapers and the *BBC for Europe* station of the World Service attended.

The most noticeable immediate effect of all this was an article the next day in the *Daily Telegraph*, by their Education Editor, John Clare. Under the headline "Spelling out the way to easy English", the article gave a succinct review of CS, including much direct speech attributed to Chris printed in CS!

The reporter from the Baltimore Sun later confirmed he was working on a feature on the subject. Chris Upward was also invited to give a number of interviews for radio, in both London and Birmingham.

The success of the launch so far and we may have to wait a while for other contacts to bear fruit — owes much to the hard work of Committee member Leo Chapman, who is acting as Press Officer right now. Aston University are also to be thanked for sponsoring the event and looking after much of the organisation.

We are expecting the wide exposure given to the Cut Spelling Handbook to generate much comment and discussion, from the membership as well as from outside. In due course a special newsletter of comment will be issued, similar to the one published after New Spelling 90.

A good idea from Leo Chapman follows.

### **Request Cut Spelling for your local library**

Members are asked to request their local library to obtain a copy of the Cut Spelling Handbook. This will bring the book to a wider audience and generate some useful sales for the Society.

We suggest you do **not** just make a simple verbal request but a formal one for yourself — most libraries charge 30p or so for this service. Of course, you will have already seen the book but when you return it, it will be on the shelf for others to find.

Details for the request card:

- CUT SPELLING — A Handbook
- ISBN 0 9506391 3 3
- Publ. by Simplified Spelling Society
- 306pp. Price £12 post free.

## Letters

[Damian Bonsall: see [Newsletter SS15](#) Item 7]

### 3. A CONVERSION

*New member **Damian Bonsall** was so enthused to find the Society that he wrote this account of his "conversion".*

My wife is a teacher in a Special Needs school. There are 15 in her class. She held a spelling test and told me that not one of her pupils had got 10 on 10. She showed me the papers and, apart from a couple of words spelt hopelessly, the wrongly spelt words were *spelt phonetically*.

Despite having been shown the correct spellings innumerable times over many years, they were still spelling incorrectly. This I found profoundly depressing, but it set me thinking.

Are these children irredeemably stupid? Is there some systematic way of teaching them to spell? How can anyone be so thick that they can't spell? It's a very dark mystery. So exactly what is wrong with these children? How do they spell? Phonetically — but why?

Because they have been taught the alphabet and the sound value of the letters, and to join them up to make words. So that is why they arrive at a phonetic result.

Then, like a bolt out of the blue, it struck me that they were indeed spelling *correctly* — it was the rest of us who are wrong! Me and the other 300 million English users. The children are logical and systematic. Forcing them to be otherwise is a cruelty, and cruelty to children is abhorrent.

I resolved on the spot to devise a new spelling system and to write a translexic dictionary so that the rest of us could change over to the way children spell.

I had only just started this task — which I thought would take several years — when I came across an article in *The Guardian*.

I wrote off for details and imagine my delight when I found that the task had been done already — a whole new spelling system, all polished up and ready for use. And 120 like-minded reformers in the Simplified Spelling Society. So now there are 121 (*actually, not quite! Ed.*), and, not forgetting the 15 children in my wife's class, that leaves 299,999,864 English users to convert. But we're bound to win. We have the children on our side.

## 4. An Anti-ITA-ist.

*Despite normal policy being not to print letters from anonymous writers, this one from Scotland caused some alarm about the teaching standards encountered. How to find the writer and put him or her straight?*

". . . At five I was introduced to the ITA teaching method and I cannot condemn strongly enough the man who devised it. As a student now aged 20 I wonder how, having been taught by that method for a year, I ever managed to pass my highers. My teachers could not understand why I failed to grasp the concept and as a result I spent a very frustrated first year at school. Possibly my problem lay in the fact that I did not pronounce *the* as *dht* or *with* as *widh*.

To my relief on entering primary two the class was informed that they would be returning to the proper way of spelling. My relief was short-lived. Having been forced to read in ITA I found the transition difficult and my spelling is still for the most part a matter of guessing...

I would ask you to consider if you really know what you are doing... Do we really need a minority of misguided educational reformers saying 'dhis is dhe wae too do it' and thus creating chaos in our already troubled schools?"

## 5. In brief:

### EDINBURGH 21–26 June

*Any member who might be available to help with a stall at the Commonwealth Press Union meeting at the Sheraton Hotel please contact Bob Brown.*

### PRESS COVERAGE

Below is the headline of a feature which appeared in the education section of *The Guardian* on February 1–5.

#### **A nue wae to spel wirdz.**

Needless to say, Jonathan Sale — a freelance educational journalist — did not get everything quite right, but it was a good try to understand our arguments. It has resulted so far in 30-odd enquiries and a number of new members. It also gave rise to enquiries from broadcasting organisations, one of which has so far resulted in the Secretary being interviewed on Radio Wales.