

Keith Waterhouse and the AAAA

A genius...



"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first working breakfast of the **Association for the Abolition of the Aberrant Apostrophe** – the AAAA as it is known to our myriad town and country members.

The AAAA has two simple goals.

Its first is to round up and confiscate superfluous apostrophes from, for example, fruit and vegetable stalls where potato's, tomatoe's and apple's are openly on sale.

Its second, is to redistribute as many as possible of these impounded apostrophes, restoring missing apostrophes where they have been lost, mislaid or deliberately hijacked – as for instance by British Rail, which as part of its refurbishment programme, is dismantling the apostrophes from such stations as King's Cross and shunting them off at dead of night to a secret apostrophe siding at Crewe.

Ladies and gentlemen, examples of the misuse of apostrophes abound.

In the AAAA's Black Apostrophe Museum in the basement, which you are welcome to visit (no children or persons of nervous disposition please), you will find an advertisement from The Guardian for Technical Author's; a circular from the National Council for the Training of Journalists, if you please, containing the phrase 'as some editor's will know.

There's also an announcement from Austin Rover about the new Maestro's; a leaflet from Hereford and Worcester County Council called 'How the Council Spends it's Money'; and many other apostrophic atrocities too gruesome to describe while you are eating your Danish pastries.

How has this pestilence come about?

The AAAA's laboratories have identified it as a virus, probably introduced into the country in a bunch of bananas and spread initially by greengrocers, or greengrocer's as they usually style themselves.

Apostrophe Interpolation, Displacement and Suppression – AID'S, as the affliction is known – recognises no frontiers.

It afflicts the highest and the lowest of the land alike, the educated along with the sub-literate. The Times (shortly to be renamed The Times's) as well as The Sun.

Why, even the Daily Mail itself, it has to be confessed between these four walls, is not immune. I hold in my hand a misprinting of who's for whose which was detected in its pages only a short while ago.

Ladies and gentlemen, when we find ourselves in a world where a newsagent's placard can read 'Gleny's Kinnock Lead's Teachers Strike', the Apocalypse is near and something must be done.

Apostrophic anarchists, deliberately disrupting the apostrophe's function as part of their wider plan to destroy English grammar, must be weeded out root and branch.

Innocent misusers of the apostrophe – for instance the Darlington bus company promising 'Shopping Trips to Leed's' – must be hustled off to night school in plain vans for a crash course in punctuation.

If necessary, children must be stopped outside the classroom and frisked for aberrant apostrophes, and the pushers identified.

But what can we, as individuals, do to stop the rot, bearing in mind that your Association will have no truck with the proscribed militant Apostrophe Abolition Army, whose declared aim is to stamp out the now universal use of 'it's' for the possessive 'its' by blowing up offending printing plants?

What we can do, ladies and gentlemen, is to be vigilant and relentless in our pursuit of the aberrant apostrophe. We must write to each and every publication that transgresses in this respect.

When they write back pleading that it was a regrettable printers error, we must reply by return of post that no it wasn't, it was a regrettable printer's error, or even more accurately, the error of a regrettable printer.

We must boycott shops selling Co's lettuce, bean's and such like contaminated products.

Members of the AAAA are invited to forward examples of misplaced apostrophes to the Association for possible use in our touring exhibitions, provided that these do not infringe the Post Office regulations on the sending of obnoxious matter through the mails.

The AAAA regrets that its hardworking staff will be unable to acknowledge contributions individually, but assures members that every apostrophe submitted will be scrutinised keenly and considered on its demerits.

The AAAA has no membership cards and no subscription. Members are, however, asked to donate at least one aberrant apostrophe when attending our meetings, rallies and conferences.

I have to point out that we are considerably overstocked on their's, it's and who's, and can consider no further examples until those we have accumulated have been ploughed into the Association's apostrophe dump at Devizes.

You are now asked to place the aberrant apostrophes you have brought with you in the offertory bags being passed among you by the ushers.

During the collection, we will all rise and sing the AAAA's battle anthem, 'Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts For Soldiers'.

Anyone singing a misplaced apostrophe will be instantly ejected from the hall".