

## A Word in Your Ear...

Before I get started with 'Don't get me started' I should state clearly that I realise I am tiptoeing tentatively into contested territory and that many may not agree with everything I have to say. However, I am sure that many will, and that is why I can stray, with at least some degree of confidence, into the bloody arena of 'language butchering'.

I am sure I won't be alone in confessing to some despair at the needless way in which our language has changed – maimed would be a more appropriate term – over recent years, and whilst acknowledging and accepting that change is going to happen (Verily, I say unto thee, t'is inevitable!) change for change's sake is a slippery slope, leading to increased linguistic confusion, obfuscation, and needless verbosity.

I'll start with a recent example – spotted in a pub garden, not a million miles from here. (Show photo) This is a classic example, where a perfectly good two-letter word (to) has been pointlessly replaced by another perfectly good (but totally wrong) four-letter word (with). And I'm sure, like me, other four-letter words are now starting to drift into your minds.

No more than 50 metres from this offensive graffiti hangs another example of language defacement – unfortunately so common as to pass unnoticed by many, perhaps the majority, of our increasingly indifferent, and grammar-ignorant public. I speak, of course, of the misuse/ absence of the possessive apostrophe. (Show photo) Here we have Waters Edge Pizza and Carvery (located, and surely not totally coincidentally, by the water's edge) and here again (show photo) is an advert for a local cleaning company – nice writing, beautifully clean car, but can you hire Monicas as well as Maids – or have they, as I suspect, over-enthusiastically hoovered up an apostrophe somewhere along the line?

Sadly, the language butchers do not stop at the written form, clumsily hacking away at what was lovingly gifted to the world by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and many illustrious others. A handful of examples will serve to illustrate what I am getting at.

Travelling today by British Rail (or whatever they now call themselves), and having been lulled to sleep by the wonderful array of comestibles on offer and the smoothest of post-prandial rides, the end of the journey hoves into view. "We will shortly be arriving..." "IN Watford! half the carriage shouts; AT Watford!" shouts the remainder; but no...we are, apparently, now arriving INTO our beloved destination. Since when IN and AT became inadequate, I really have no idea, but the four-letter worders have been at it again.

Other examples, which cause both my hackles and blood pressure to rise dangerously, include my offspring stating that they are, quote 'excited FOR my holiday in August' (why? Is your holiday going to receive a gift, or get a nice surprise?) or, when ordering at a restaurant, asking the person serving us 'Can I GET a hamburger and chips, please? (No, dear child, that's why you pay the waiter – to get it for you.) Equally annoying (and possibly open to very dangerous misinterpretation in our increasingly litigious world) is the DJ or radio presenter who concludes the inane phone-call to their programme by telling the caller that 'I love you,' to which the caller replies 'I love you too.' Surely, they have never met so that this is, by any stretch of the imagination, taking things too far on a first date? And to make things worse, several million listeners can bear witness to this very public declaration of their deepest feelings for each other.

However, my favourite, if that's the right word, came when I worked in a primary school in Hemel Hempstead. It was just coming up to 'home time' when a parent, in obvious discomfort, knocked at my door and proceeded, red-faced, to ask if she could 'borrow the toilet.' 'Of course you can, Mrs Muggins,' I said, sympathetically, 'provided you bring it back in the morning.'

Oooh! Don' get me started!