

Time for radio presenters to get their pronunciation right

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■ Ness Point, Britain's most easterly point, at Lowestoft, pronounced 'Lowstoftf' or 'Lowst'fft'.

Ever since the 1920s the BBC has had, under various names, a Pronunciation Unit. It has been their job to advise announcers on how to pronounce particular words: new words, foreign words, surnames, place-names.

However, they realised early on that members of the general public might also like to receive information of that sort; and in the 1920s and 1930s they published word-lists to help people in this way – in the *Radio Times*, for instance.

More recently they've worked on and produced the authoritative *BBC Pronunciation Dictionary of British Names*, published by Oxford University Press. I've got the second edition. It gives place names, river names, and surnames. It must be useful for foreigners to know that, surprisingly, Thames is pronounced "Temz". It tells you that Wymondham (Norfolk) is "Wind'm". It shows Cholmondeley is 'Chumly'. They've even got Trudgill in there (with the hard 'g', of course) – so it must be a good book.

I do wonder, though, what has happened to the copy of this important BBC refer-

ence work which must surely be on the shelves of the BBC Radio Norfolk studios in The Forum in Norwich. Has anyone there looked at it lately? I really rather doubt it – which is a pity because the dictionary is the result of many years of research, and was specifically designed for BBC broadcasters.

One reason for my doubt is that the dictionary says very clearly, on page 155, that Lowestoft has two syllables: 'low', as in low; followed by 'stoftf' or 'st'fft' or 'st'ff'. 'Lowst'ff' is the most local pronunciation, but the dictionary also gives the two other choices. What it doesn't mention is a pronunciation with three syllables: 'Low-ess-tofft'. But we keep hearing this in

local traffic reports and sports reports.

The dictionary also tells BBC announcers how to say Sprowston – with the same vowel as in Lowestoft – but have our local BBC presenters looked at page 228 to check up on this? And it also gives Heigham as "Hay-um" (page 116).

It is the official policy of the British Broadcasting Corporation that "for British personal names and titles, the BBC uses the pronunciation adopted by the individual concerned. For British place-names, the BBC follows local educated usage".

So have a look at the dictionary please, together – and if you've lost your Radio Norfolk copy, we'll have a whip round and get you another one.