

# THE LIFE OF RILEY

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England's palindromic town of New Bybwen is one of the great tourist attractions for wordsmiths, logologists, recreational linguists and lay fellows of the Order of Saint Aldhelm. Most visitors eventually wind up at the town's celebrated watering hole, the Drab & Bard, hoping to catch the eye of its prettiest serving wench, Elsie Isle. One such visitor was a Bostonian of Irish extraction known only by his surname of Riley. To be accepted by the natives one has to feature in some form of palindrome and the following anecdotes concern Riley's New Bybwenization.

**The Deception** Mr. Andrew E.R.D. Narm is the landlord of the Drab & Bard and has a large poster advertisin "tinned long pig" on a wall of his saloon bar. Innocents presume it to be cannibal luncheon meat whereas it is merely Merry Andrew's excuse to pose the question "Who can can who?" This word-ordered palindromic question is a lirt (a deception or trick) and the landlord prides himself on his ability to give quick-witted retorts to the replies of those who fall for his jape. Naturally, the transatlantic visitor fell for it and the barroom regulars joined in the laughter of 'mine host' as he exclaimed "YE LIRT, RILEY!"

**The Tulip Tree** Dr. A. Noel Leonard, the director of Ooze Zoo, takes great pride in his North American tulip tree, the liri dendron, which grows near the main entrance to New Bybwen's famed zoological garden, and Riley happened by just as the good doctor was having an argument about Scrabble with a fellow townsman. Soon it developed into a brawl which had the Bostonian accidentally becoming embroiled and being knocked against the doctor's tulip tree. Most of what the director said has long been forgotten but his concluding remarks have since passed into local folklore: "...NOR D, NED. OI, RILEY, YE LIRIODENDRON!"

**The Tail of the Hood** Riley also featured in adventures which are far too tedious to recall but concerned such as lire (flesh, muscle, brawn), lirk (a fold of the skin), lirp (a snap of the fingers) and, so it is alleged, lirot. (This word lurks in some computer spelling checks, but means nothing to civilized folk who disdain those engines of the devil!) Perhaps Riley's most curious adventure concerns the liripoop, the long tail of a graduate's hood in historical times. It is alleged that he encountered the ghost of a scholar who suffered from flatulence but who attempted to explain away his offensive stench by blaming it upon the malodorous dye used to colour his headgear. When the American accused him of breaking ghasly wind, the shade replied "POOP? I, RILEY? YE LIRIPOOP!"

The Bird Riley's Christian name, incidentally, is Samuel, a fact he revealed to Dr. Leonard after he had extricated himself from the remains of the tulip tree. In actual fact the doctor only pretended to take pride in the liriodendron which was a gift to the zoo by his mother-in-law and so the two men soon struck up a friendship which had the director taking the American chum on a tour of the establishment. The compound which most fascinated Riley housed several llamas and a ynambu, a large species of tinamou (a bird which resembles a guinea fowl but is related to the ostrich). Riley was fascinated by the antics of this curious bird which, for some symbiotic reason the doctor couldn't explain, rushed around grooming the llamas. All that Noel said was "SAM, ALL YNAMBU RUB MANY LLAMAS."

#### THE OXFORD HATCHETTE FRENCH DICTIONARY

Word Ways does not normally review foreign-language dictionaries. However, an exception must be made for this handsome 1950-page volume, published in 1996 by Oxford University Press for \$25. Possibly the first interlingual dictionary to take full advantage of modern lexicographic techniques, it employed a computer-based collection of citations to determine which meanings of a word are most commonly used in French and English. Editors then carefully matched by hand appropriate French words or phrases to each different meaning, a by-no-means-straightforward task: for instance, French uses different terms for "as a precautionary measure", "as a preventive measure" and "as a temporary measure". The dictionary user is assisted by lexical usage quotes (information about similar word classes such as colors, French place names, numbers, etc.) and basic information on functional words (you, be, that, against, etc.). Would that other languages had such a comprehensive and scholarly vade mecum!