



THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

Formed to promote the Ulster-Scots Language in Literature And Native Speech.

Ms I McCulloch (Hon. Sec.)

Belfast 5

15/7/93

Mr Bruce Priestley
c/o O.E.N.I.
Rathgael House, Bangor, Co Down

Dear Mr Priestley

I write on behalf of the Ulster-Scots Language Society to seek specific educational support for Ulster-Scots language development in Northern Ireland, along with enhanced cultural support for Ulster-Scots traditions in general.

The Ulster-Scots Language Society was formed in late 1992 but has already almost 200 full members. The first issue of our magazine ULLANS received a generous grant from the Cultural Traditions Programme. A copy of our Constitution is enclosed, and you will note that we are a non-political organisation.

The Ulster-Scots language is a sister tongue of lowland Scots, or Lallans, although over the past 400 years Ulster-Scots has developed its own internal dialects, grammar and literary traditions.

Following the example of Gaelic in Ireland, and Gaelic and Lallans in Scotland, we are currently seeking official EC recognition as a European Lesser-Used Language. We understand that this could assist us in our wish to reverse the marginalisation of our culture and language, as articulated in the enclosed article by Ivan Herbison in a recent Fortnight supplement. Mr Herbison is a lecturer in the School of English at QUB, and is not a member of our Society.

Our preliminary concern, however, is to restore the dignity of Ulster-Scots as a language and to establish for it a place within formal education in our schools. We find it regrettable that the only academic study of Ulster-Scots is to be found in English language departments, and in the context of Non-Standard English.

We therefore wish to establish an "Ulster-Scots Academy" on the precedent of the Frisian Academy in Holland. The parallels between the fate of the Frisian language versus Dutch in Holland and that of Ulster-Scots versus English in the UK are numerous. An Ulster-Scots Academy is an essential step towards the recognition of Ulster-Scots as an academic discipline in its own right. I have enclosed a text we have prepared arguing the case for an Ulster-Scots Academy. In the absence of Governmental support, we intend to proceed on a modest and informal level to hold informal gatherings of native speakers and Ulster-Scots scholars to establish consensus on spellings and develop teaching materials.

Clearly it would be a major boost to our plans if an appropriate department of Government was to provide our Academy with financial assistance. It would be difficult to envisage, for example, how any such organisation could be effective unless it was funded and staffed at least to the same extent of the "Irish" language group, the Ultach Trust, of which I am also a member. We await your response with anticipation.

Yours sincerely

Jan Adamson

Dr I Adamson (Chairman)
24 June 1993

Encs

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN ULSTER-SCOTS ACADEMY

The Ulster-Scots Language Society is acutely aware that full (braid) Ulster-Scots only survives as a vernacular tongue in a few declining areas of counties Antrim, Down and Donegal. We are dismayed by the continued social stigmatisation and cultural marginalisation of our language. The widespread acceptance of these attitudes is based largely on ignorance of the historical validity of the Scots language in Ulster.

Perhaps as many as 300,000 people in Ulster have a fair degree of competence in the spoken language, and we estimate that as many as 100,000 may use it as their first or only tongue. However, only a tiny fraction of these native speakers have any degree of literacy in Ulster-Scots. As part of our objective of enhancing the prestige of Ulster-Scots, and "re-establishing its dignity as a language", we have been encouraged by our own members to organise classes. However, there are no grammar text-books, school courses, university or college departments or academic qualifications in Ulster-Scots. Our literature is antiquated and inaccessible, no dictionary defines for us the vocabulary of Ulster-Scots, and there is no recognition of the language as an academic linguistic discipline in its own right. Even if we wish to organise classes for native speakers to learn literacy in our own language, there are no teachers.

In short, the establishment of an ULSTER-SCOTS ACADEMY is essential for the survival of this minority language. Our work must start from the absolute beginning as knowledge of the traditional literature and orthography of Ulster-Scots is limited to a small number of people. It is important that the development of standard orthography, along with appropriate teaching materials on grammar and syntax, is neither 'artificial' nor 'revivalist'. We believe that one important function of the Ulster-Scots Academy will be to act as a forum for native speakers and scholars alike. The promotion of Ulster-Scots as a modern written language is necessary for the survival of the oral tradition, but such scholarship must not be divorced from the living language. Authenticity, qualifications and agreement on standard spellings, when achieved through

the Academy, must be acceptable to all, or at least to the total language constituency. In this group we mean to include academics and native speakers from different dialect areas of Ulster-Scots. The first step is to develop teaching material and to train teachers. Only then will it be practical for regular radio and TV programmes to be made in Ulster-Scots, and for formal and informal language classes to be held.

The following are the priority objectives of the ULSTER-SCOTS ACADEMY:

- (1) A grammar text book for the language. The distinctive grammar, syntax and idiom of Ulster-Scots remains part of our oral tradition but has never been formalised in book form. It could be a considerable time before a book "Introduction to the Ulster-Scots Language" becomes available. Preliminary booklets on different aspects of Ulster-Scots grammar therefore may be necessary.
- (2) Dictionaries: At present many Ulster words are identified as such and included in the major Scots Dictionaries (where Ulster-Scots is recognised as a 'variant' of Scots). However these, in common with local dictionaries and glossaries, only include dialect (ie Non-Standard English) words. As Ulster-Scots shares a significant proportion of its vocabulary with English, these dictionaries do not to encompass the entire vocabulary of the language. It is imperative for teaching and creative writing needs that we have an English/Ulster-Scots as well as an Ulster-Scots/English Dictionary. It is also imperative that these dictionaries define the total vocabulary of Ulster-Scots. Proposed 'dialect' dictionaries of 'Ulster English' will include many 'Hiberno-English' words not used by Ulster-Scots speakers. They will suggest that, for example, that we have only words for the single numbers one (yin), two (twa), four (fower), six (sax) seven (sein) and eight (echt) - but not for three, five and nine. N.B. Ulster-Scots

speakers do not use a conventional English vocabulary enriched by dialect words. For example, besides the exclusively Scots word "aiblins", we frequently use "mebbe" or "maybe" rather than "perhaps". Only "aiblins" will be found in a 'dialect' dictionary. Clearly this does not reflect the vocabulary of Ulster-Scots.

- (3) Literature: As well as ensuring the continuing availability of a wide range of Ulster-Scots literature, both contemporary and traditional, it is important for the status of the language to have translations in Ulster-Scots of a range of literature classics. In particular the availability of a Bible in our own language would certainly be regarded as a major achievement. [The New Testament is available in modern Scots, being a direct translation from the original Greek. This however is in a form of Scots not familiar to most Ulster-Scots speakers and requires an 'acquired' knowledge of Lallans.]
- (4) Develop educational resource packs including teaching notes and tapes/videos.
- (5) To encourage popular interest in contemporary Ulster-Scots writing.
- (6) To become a focal point for internal linguistic debate, collecting words, etc.
- (7) To promote research in relevant areas (eg collections, field recordings, place-name studies, etc).
- (8) To develop formal qualifications for those who can demonstrate competence in the language. The Academy will need to establish a consistent and appropriate system for assessment to ensure that those teaching Ulster-Scots are competent.