


Recording of the week: when is a word not a word?

This week's selection comes from Jonnie Robinson, Lead Curator of Spoken English.

The [Evolving English: WordBank](#) is extremely positive evidence of the robust nature of our native dialects, as demonstrated by this speaker's use of the verb puggle [= 'to prod, poke about in e.g. a hole to clear obstruction']. As a young, female, middle-class speaker she doesn't conform to the usual dialect stereotype and she also comes from the south of England, where the apparent demise of local speech forms is most frequently asserted. Nonetheless she expertly describes and defines a word recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'English regional (chiefly south-east)'. Puggle also features in the 6-volume English Dialect Dictionary, the most comprehensive record of 18th and 19th century English regional vocabulary, where it's attested in Hertfordshire and Essex.

 Puggle – as defined in Vol. 4 of the English Dialect Dictionary (1898)

[To have a puggle](#)

As a dialectologist I'm also particularly interested by her observation that 'I always thought it was a real word and it turns out it's not'. This, sadly, is frequently the fate of dialect vocabulary, but I hope she and other users of perfectly valid local forms are reassured to know that the validity of puggle is acknowledged by authoritative dictionaries and that it has been around in the Home Counties for at least 150 years and clearly still survives in the 21st century – no doubt alongside other supposedly 'long-lost' southern dialect words.

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