Ulster-Scots Lesson 3

THE and THEY

1 *tha* – the Definite Article before a noun: e.g. *tha brig*

Pronounced ‘tha’ rather than ‘the’

In Ulster-Scots today, the definite article ‘the’ is spelt *tha*, not just because it sounds slightly different, but to avoid confusion with the following:

(a) ‘Tonight’, ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’ and ‘together’ are *thenicht, theday, themorra* and *thegither*. Here ‘the-’ is an abbreviation of ‘this’ – for example, ‘this night’, and so ‘this year’ also becomes *the yeir*.

(b) ‘They’, the personal pronoun, is *the* or *the’ in Ulster-Scots. Most writers include an apostrophe (*the’*) to avoid confusion with the definite article. Therefore, a sentence like ‘they were all at the dance tonight’ becomes: *The’ wur aa at tha daunce thenicht.*

2 Using the *tha* where it isn’t used in English:

*tha* is used in front of numbers – *Tha twa o thaim cum in lukin jist tha yin apiece* (**‘Two of them came in looking for only one each’**)

It is also used:

- with places – *(John Wricht comes fae tha Dee in tha coontie Doon)*
- with occupations and institutions - *(He’s startit tha schuil fur tae lairn tha bricklayin)*
- with sports and illnesses - *(He’s gien up tha fitbaa fae he tuk tha maisles)*

3 *tha* used instead of personal pronouns (your, his, etc.):

*Is tha wife cumin tae?*  
*(......... wife)*

*Tha wee fella cum aff tha bike.*  
*(......... bike)*

*A brok tha airm in twa places.*  
*(......... airm)*

4 *tha* used instead of ‘how’, ‘what’, etc.:

*A niver knowed tha age he wus*  
*(how old / ........age)*

*D’ye see tha quack thaim cloods shiftit?*  
*(......... fast)*

*Luk tha length his airms is.*  
*(...... long / ...... length)*
Spelling and Pronunciation

1  T and D, followed by an R (makes a THE or DHE sound)
   - water - wattèr (sounds like WAATTHER)
   - shoulder - shoodèr (SHOODTHER)
   - projector - projectèr
   - ladder - leddèr (LEATHER)
   - after - eftèr (EFTHER)

   Also, NN followed by an R (makes an –NTHE- sound)
   - dannèr
   - wannèr
   - genèral

2  T followed by an L (makes a glottal stop)
   e.g. metal, nettle, bottle (T is sounded with a cough, like BAW – 'KLE)

   Verbs in the future tense are either:
   - A’m fur paintin tha hoose themorra (I’m going to paint…), or
   - A’ll be paintin tha hoose themorra.

   CLASS WORK:
Write a short description of yourself in Ulster-Scots as if you were going to introduce yourself (‘My name is’ … etc.). Then ask your neighbour, ‘Wha micht you be?’, or ‘Whut dae the’ caa ye?’.

If uncertain of someone’s name, the usual form is ‘Whut’s this the’ caa him?’